BEMIS Scotland are the national Ethnic and Cultural Minorities led umbrella body supporting the development of the Ethnic Minorities Voluntary Sector in Scotland and the communities that this sector represents.

Our vision is of a Scotland that is equal, inclusive and responsive: A society where:

- people from the diverse communities are valued, treated with dignity and respect,
- have equal citizenship, opportunities and equality of life,
- and who actively participate in civic society.

BEMIS welcome the scope and direction of the Education and Culture Committees' review focus on raising attainment in Scotland's schools.

We have made submissions previously to:

(I) Developing Scotland’s young work force
(ii) The role of the third and private sectors

In these settings we have made considerations and recommendations which are also relevant to stage 3 of the committee’s enquiry. In light of this we will be direct in this response to avoid repeating considerations outlined or referenced previous submissions.

This submission includes samples of summary findings and recommendations from 4 key reports and documentary to be released in April 2015. The reports cover the outcomes and experiences of The Gathered Together Project\(^1\) findings cover the period of August 2013 – March 2015.

- Involving All Parents Report – Parent Council Training (April 2015)
- Experiences of Ethnic Minority Parents (April 2015)
- Involving All Parents – Good Practice for Parent Councils (April 2015)
- Involving All Parents – Good Practice for Schools (April 2015)

\(^1\) Gathered Together Outline – See Annex 1
Gathered Together is a pilot project between BEMIS (umbrella body for Ethnic Minority groups in Scotland) and the Scottish Parent Teacher Council. It was created following a survey conducted in 2012 by BEMIS and SPTC of Parent Councils in Scotland addressing representation of Ethnic Minorities on Parent Councils. The survey found that 77% of the parent councils in the survey had no ethnic minority members.

Gathered Together has run 35 workshops for Ethnic Minority parents across all six of the pilot areas the project has been working in- Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Falkirk, Fife, Glasgow and Stirling and Clackmannanshire. These areas were identified as providing a mix of urban and rural and to reflect the diversity of experiences that EM parents can face. **A total of 358 parents attended these workshops.**

The most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status but the extent to which that student's family is able to become involved in their children's education at school and in the community. This does not discount the challenges in participation faced by those living in socio/economic disadvantage but should emphasise the need for resources and interventions to be identified and addressed taking socio/economic disadvantage into account to mitigate barriers to parental involvement.

The existing evidence supports the use of interventions focused on parental involvement in children's education to improve outcomes. The immediate focus should be on rolling out and closely monitoring such interventions.

Parents' main contact with school is through attending parents' evenings and in dropping off and picking up their children.

- In primary school parents had diverse opportunities for coming into school including attending fairs, assemblies, concerts.
- In secondary school parents had very limited contact with school and their main contact is through parents' evenings.

Language is a significant barrier for many parents and also impacts on their ability to communicate with school, speak to teachers about issues with their children and on their confidence to go into school.

In common with all parents time, child care and work were barriers to becoming more involved- this was particularly a barrier for parents who did not have close family and friends to help with childcare and were not able to access nursery.

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• Where parents were involved in the school to celebrate their culture- including bilingual story-telling, being invited to speak about their religion or share their food, parents were very positive and felt respected and this helped to create a sense that they and their family were a part of the school community

• Differences in education systems and culture were also frequently mentioned by parents as a barrier- parents were not aware how the Scottish education system worked, including who to approach, their right to have their voice heard within the school

  o Parents of secondary school children expressed concerns about the new exam system and were unsure about the best way to support their children and options for their future. They often felt there was a lack of information or that the information was not easily accessible

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**Barriers Identified and positive Interventions:**

Please note that these identified barriers and opportunities to enact positive change will be expanded upon in full April reports. These are samples of good practice currently being employed in some schools across Scotland.

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<th>Barriers to parent participation</th>
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<td>• Bilingual Story telling</td>
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Celebrating Wider achievements

- Engaging with local community organisations providing specialist additional education.
  - Community Schools
  - Cultural organisations

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Annex 1

GATHERED TOGETHER is a pilot project working to support ethnic and cultural minority parents to become more involved in their child’s education and the school community.

We are a joint venture between BEMIS and SPTC, funded by the Scottish Government through its Third Sector Early Intervention Fund, managed by the Big Fund. We have been working closely with parents, schools and local authorities to identify and build good practice in inclusion and equality. We are working in six local authorities - Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Falkirk, Fife, Glasgow and Stirling & Clackmannanshire.

We are working directly with parents and carers from all ethnic and cultural backgrounds, finding out about their experiences of involvement with their children’s school and education, barriers that they experience to getting more involved and giving them information about their rights as parents and the role of the Parent Council in being a voice for parents.

We also offer training that gives parent councils the chance to think about why parents aren’t getting involved in the school community and provide the opportunity to develop practical solutions to help to overcome any barriers. SPTC are working with us to deliver this training. We want to share your good practice and offer practical advice when it comes to involving parents.
Submission from Donna Burnett

Educational Attainment Gap – Involvement of Parents

I answer these questions from my own personal perspective as mum of 2 children: daughter who is age 20 and left school after S6 in 2013; son who is age 15 and currently in S3. My children attended Our Lady of Good Aid Cathedral Primary School and Our Lady’s High School, both Motherwell.

Do schools always explain clearly to parents how children learn throughout their school years and how parents could help their development (e.g. with reading and wider literacy approaches)?

My experience is that schools do not always do this. Some teachers do this really well but this does not happen consistently and the standard of information and advice I have received has varied considerably.

With regard to how I can support my child’s development, some teachers have provided advice on how I can support my child’s development, some have only provided this when asked and some do not provide this even when asked.

As my children have progressed through school I have found that I get more information directly from them regarding the support they feel they require. This support has not always been available from the school.

Are schools always flexible enough to allow parents to be involved in their child’s education (given parents’ work commitments, for example)?

In my experience parental involvement in secondary school is limited to parent meetings around specific topics/events, parent’s nights for feedback on child’s progress, pupil report, Parent Council, fundraising group and events. The schools my children have attended have been able to demonstrate flexibility regarding times of these meetings, individual appointments, etc. There is much less flexibility with regards to the approach and nature of parental involvement more closely related to improving educational attainment and supporting own child and other young people to improve their individual attainment.

What is the extent to which schools offer particular support to the parents of pupils from the most disadvantaged communities, in order to improve the attainment of those pupils?

I am not aware of particular support to parents of pupils from the most disadvantaged communities. Given the educational attainment gap it is clear that this is insufficient to lift the attainment of those children in a large proportion of cases. The level of support provided by more affluent parents to support their child’s development includes increasing levels of private tutoring and I am aware of an extensive number of existing and retired teachers who provide individual and group
tutoring. To my knowledge, the extent to which this contributes to educational attainment is yet to be investigated to be fully understood. The significance of this to the attainment levels in schools needs to be recognised as it disguises failings in our schools which the parents of pupils from the most disadvantaged communities are unable to supplement.

Is there evidence to demonstrate which approaches used by schools have been most successful and whether these are being used, as appropriate, throughout Scotland?

In my experience, and in taking account of the experiences of friends and family whose children are at a range of schools in different local authority areas, parental involvement appears to be better in primary schools than in secondary schools. This does vary greatly though across different schools and areas, from involvement of a few parents in Parent Councils and fundraising groups, to involvement in supporting your own child/ren, to involvement of parents in adding value to the educational experience of large groups of young people.

Parental involvement greatly improved in Our Lady of Good Aid Cathedral Primary School towards the end of my daughter’s time there when a new Head Teacher was appointed and it is my understanding that this has continued to improve. The parental involvement in this school goes beyond parents supporting their own children but includes parents, grandparents and guardians supporting young people to improve their reading skills, running after school clubs, and much more. This parental involvement stems from the head teacher’s leadership skills, ability to identify resources and utilise these, and ability to develop and nurture productive partnerships. Parental involvement is an ongoing process in the school and continues to evolve and improve. My observation is that it is not something that happens as an “add on” but is integrated into the operation of the school.

Has greater parental involvement in school education through the Parental Involvement Act (2006) led to an improvement in pupil attainment?

Not in my experience. I think that there is a significant amount of improved pupil attainment as a result of an increased use of private tutors, which came to my attention when my daughter reached 5th year and Higher qualifications. The extent to which this contributes to the educational attainment gap is not known but the attainment of young people in more affluent families who fund this additional support is evidence that it is likely to be significant.

Parental involvement by the education department within the local authority is very poor and they provide no leadership in terms of this. Last year I was involved in responding to a local consultation regarding a proposal to merge Our Lady’s High School, with another high school. This proposal was drawn up without any discussion with parents and as a result failed to meet the requirements to achieve improved educational benefits and in turn failed to achieve the support of parents, the community and the Learning and Leisure Committee, who rejected the proposal. At a time when pressure is on local authorities to make savings, this exercise failed at a substantial cost to the local authority in terms of the extensive amount of work
on the proposal and the consultation. Attempts to achieve parental involvement in the development of a new proposal have failed.

**Are there any new measures that could realistically be taken (for example, by the Scottish Government, local authorities, parents’ forums, the voluntary sector, etc) to help parents raise their child’s attainment?**

I think that there is a wealth of untapped resources in families and local communities that would enhance the educational experience of young people. I also believe that local authorities have become so preoccupied with making financial cuts that they have lost sight of the contributions that can enhance their performance at little or no cost. In my experience local authority engagement of parents in creating the best educational outcome for all young people feels tokenistic.

It is important to gain a better understanding of the success factors for high attainment, including those additional resources and experiences provided for some pupils outside of school, to be able to provide sufficient support to increase attainment of those who do not have access to these resources and experiences.

Comparison with the independent school sector would also inform improvement in local authority schools. I appreciate that the cost of running an independent school is higher but it is a model that consistently performs better. There is a different model of parental and pupil engagement and involvement in the independent sector to learn from.

Parents do not need to be involved in supporting only their own children. In some areas there are examples of parents and other members of the school community mentoring young people, providing work placements, etc.

I am concerned that this consultation appears to be focussed on parents support to raise the attainment of their own children, as the African proverb says “it takes a village to raise a child”. The whole school community, including parents, should be engaged and utilised to improve the attainment of all of the children in a school.

I am happy to be contacted to discuss any of the above.
EVIDENCE FOR THE EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE INQUIRY ON THE EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT GAP

Consultation 3: How parents (including guardians) and schools can work best together to raise all pupils’ attainment, particularly those whose attainment is lowest.

Introduction

Established in 2011, CELCIS is the Centre for excellence for looked after children in Scotland. Our remit is to work with service providers (such as schools and colleges) to improve the experiences and outcomes of children and young people who are (or have been) ‘looked after’ by local authorities. For this reason our responses to the questions posed by the Committee are framed in consideration of the particular circumstances of looked after young people and care leavers.

Question 1: Do schools always explain clearly to parents how children learn throughout their school years? How can parents help their children’s development (e.g. with reading and wider literacy approaches)?

Scottish schools use a wide range of approaches to inform parents about ‘what’ children learn, including school handbooks and websites, meetings on aspects of the curriculum, and inviting parents to be classroom helpers. These approaches are complimented by the online resources provided by Education Scotland; in particular the recently updated Parentzone Scotland website.¹ A number of these approaches and resources also provide an opportunity for schools to explain the ‘how’ children learn, and the role parents and carers have in supporting them.

However, while schools and their partners (especially third sector organisations) are increasingly aware of the need to support the home to understand children’s learning stages and styles,² we believe that schools (and managing local education authorities) could do more to enable parents and carers to help with children’s development. Increased support in understanding (and adapting to) ‘how’ children learn would be of particular benefit to parents and carers from more disadvantaged backgrounds, who may not appreciate how important the ‘home’

¹ [http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/parentzone/]
² For example, please see the ‘Learning at Home’ section of the Parentzone website, or the Scottish Book Trust resources.
environment is to a child’s school success. In a seminal review of the impact of parental involvement on children’s education, Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) concluded that:

“Parental involvement in the form of ‘at-home good parenting’ has a significant positive effect on children’s achievement and adjustment even after all other factors shaping attainment have been taken out of the equation. In the primary age range the impact caused by different levels of parental involvement is much bigger than differences associated with variations in the quality of schools. The scale of the impact is evident across all social classes and all ethnic groups.”

This strong link between the ‘voluntary expression of parental involvement’ and school outcomes has been found in other, subsequent meta-analyses of the research, and it is now widely accepted by educationalists. But more recent research has also highlighted the need for, and positive effects of, ‘school and community led parental involvement’ approaches. An example would be teachers training parents how to teach their children to read. In a study carried out by the University of Strathclyde for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), the authors found that parents with low incomes or who live in poverty mostly have high aspirations for their children, but that they need support in specific ways of supporting their children in learning.

The JRF research suggests that many of the traditional methods of engaging with parents (e.g. parents’ meetings in school) have little impact on supporting parents (and therefore pupils) from more disadvantaged backgrounds. The degree to which parents are able (or the degree to which they feel able) to provide active support to their child’s literacy or numeracy development varies significantly, and families are not always aware of the literacy practices and skills valued by schools. Close (2001) is among many authors to stress the critical importance of raising the self-confidence of parents and carers in relation to their role in supporting children’s development.

A number of effective approaches (to supporting parents and carers) have been identified in a systematic review carried out for UK Department for Education

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4 [http://www.uk.sagepub.com/oleary2e/study/Journal%20Articles/Article%209%20-%20Jeynes.pdf](http://www.uk.sagepub.com/oleary2e/study/Journal%20Articles/Article%209%20-%20Jeynes.pdf)
5 Jeynes, W (2012) A meta-analysis of different types of parental involvement programs for urban students, Urban Education 47(4), pp. 706 - 742
These include helping carers of young children to use developmental activities (e.g. reading, games) and supporting parents of older children to participate and engage with children’s learning at home. In relation to looked after children specifically, organisations such as The Fostering Network have developed programmes such as ‘Fostering Achievement’ (currently in operation in Northern Ireland and London), where teachers and schools work to promote the role of foster carers as ‘first educators’. However, it should be noted that the DfE report was unequivocal in its conclusion that good, effective practice was not tied to a specific programme or approach, but rather with:

“[...] schools which were proactive, had listened to parents, and refined their strategy to take account of their suggestions and built on activities it considered successful. Where there is effective parental involvement the single most important factor was found to be the enthusiasm of the head-teacher.”

The authors go on to highlight the need for school approaches to ‘parental engagement’ to be integrated into the core of its approach to teaching (not a ‘bolt on’ to mainstream activities), and for programmes to have a clear focus on raising children’s achievement. (Many schools, they found, prioritised their relationship with parents over promoting pupil achievement.) The report’s authors also suggest that “interventions are more likely to be effective when they are informed by the views of parents identified by means of thorough needs assessment”. This applied in particular to marginalised groups, which in the Scottish context would include kinship carers and the parents of children ‘looked after at home’.

In the current context of ‘Children’s Services Planning’ and mandatory consultation in respect to ‘early learning and childcare’ provision (Parts 3 and 6, respectively, of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014), Scottish local authorities have an unparalleled opportunity to carry out just this kind of ‘thorough needs assessment’ described in the DfE report. We strongly urge the Scottish Government to emphasise (through statutory guidance and secondary legislation) the need for every Community Planning Partnership to carry out such assessments. Potential models for the process (and how to carry out the necessary analysis of the data) already exist in Scotland, in the form of the Improving Children’s Outcomes programme operated by Perth & Kinross and Dundee, the Realigning Children’s Services programme recently commissioned by the Scottish Government, and the Glasgow Indicators Project.

10 Fostering Achievement (Northern Ireland) Fostering Achievement (London)
11 Ibid, p.24
12 Ibid, p.25
14 Dartington Social Research Unit, Improving Children’s Outcomes programme
15 Understanding Glasgow: The Glasgow Indicators Project
To improve the level and quality of parental / carer engagement in children’s education we believe it is critically important that schools and local authorities are motivated and equipped to support parents. Approaches should be localised, and sensitive to individual and community needs. Introducing such approaches on a significant scale is likely to require additional resources (or redeployment of existing resources) and skilled professionals trained to work with parents in the home and other community settings. In the interests of raising the attainment of looked after children, and closing the attainment gap more generally, supporting parents and carers to understand ‘how’ children learn (and how they can support children’s development) should be a priority area for the resources soon to be made available to Scottish schools through the Attainment Scotland Fund.\textsuperscript{16}

**Question 2: Are schools always flexible enough to allow parents to be involved in their children’s education (given parents’ work commitments, for example)?**

Through our engagement with carers, teachers and other educational practitioners we have encountered a wide variety of practice, with some schools flexible and accommodating of parent / carer needs, others much less so. What we have observed, in line with the conclusions of the DfE Evidence Review, is that the leadership of the head teacher is central to the priority given to involving parents and carers. The head teacher has a key role in prescribing the parameters of engagement and, critically, its tone; teacher attitudes towards parents are an important barrier to effective and inclusive practice.\textsuperscript{17}

An example from a recent focus group with kinship carers illustrates this point. A kinship carer had an arrangement with the head teacher of her grandson’s primary school whereby she was on-call to visit the school at short notice if the boy’s behaviour became difficult for the class teacher to manage. This approach was usually successful in calming and re-engaging the child, and both carer and teacher felt supported through the process. Unfortunately, however, a new head teacher disapproved of the arrangement, and brought it to an end. The child’s behaviour subsequently led to several exclusions. Although this story reflects the experiences of only one carer (and presents just one side of the story) it is consistent with other reports, and the academic literature. At the same focus group, a representative of a third sector agency told us:

> “We often hear from young people that the only communication between their parents and their school is when something negative has taken place; this must be a barrier to parent engagement as well as heightening the young person’s resentment. Many of the parents we work with already feel

\textsuperscript{16} SG website news story (09/02/2015) Smart money on attainment [website accessed on 20/03/2015]

\textsuperscript{17} Goodall, J & Vorhaus, J (2011) Review of best practice in parental engagement, Department of Education Research Report, p.48
that they have failed as parents and have this re-enforced by reports of negative behaviour from school. Parents need positive re-enforcement of their skills and hearing regular positive feedback about their kids, however small, can help achieve this.”

Some parents and carers (including foster carers) of looked after children will have had a negative experience of school themselves, and may, as a result, not prioritise the children’s education, or be anxious about engaging with the school. Some will have literacy and numeracy issues, leading to embarrassment and fears of stigma. These factors act as barriers to successful engagement between school and carer, and serve to reinforce the practical challenges faced by many, such as work commitments, access to transport, child and other caring responsibilities.

To meaningfully engage with all parents and carers (not just those willing and able) schools need to develop approaches which are flexible, sensitive and responsive to need. This requires school staff to have had appropriate training and coaching, particularly when working with parents / carers whose backgrounds are very different to their own. ‘Parental engagement’ should therefore be a core element of initial teacher training, and continuing professional development. Suitably trained staff (including head teachers) should understand that effective ‘parental engagement’ will look different to different people, according to the skills and values of parents and carers. Schools strategies must be flexible enough to respond to the variety of parenting styles, and not impose a one-size-fits-all approach. This again highlights the need for proper assessments of pupil and family need, and for schools to have systems in place with which they can measure the efficacy of their interventions.

In an unpublished thesis Rhona McKinnon suggests that schools must also have clarity of purpose regarding their activities to involve parents. For example, an ‘open-door’ approach to engagement, without clear parameters on what can be discussed, carries the risk that the engagement quickly becomes about ‘student progress’, reflecting the school’s priorities, not the parents. This limits the potential of the engagement to break down barriers between home and school, and to provide a richer picture of the child and their social environment. In one school included in McKinnon’s research, issues about children’s academic progress were excluded from the drop-in surgery available to parents.

Finally, we would recommend that greater emphasis is placed on outreach work, facilitating parental engagement within the home or community spaces, rather than within the school itself. The DfE Evidence Review finds that children’s centres

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18 CELCIS and Pupil Inclusion Network (2014) focus group for kinship carers, exploring issues of exclusion
can be particularly effective in involving parents and families.\textsuperscript{21} In interviews parents reported that these centres helped them to become more confident in speaking to teachers, and in developing an understanding of how children learn. Moreover, parental support programmes which focused on both academic outcomes and training in parenting skills was found to be more effective than interventions that do not include such ‘parent’ training.\textsuperscript{22}

For looked after children there are additional reasons for taking an outreach approach, including potential breaches of children’s confidentiality if work is carried out in groups, and the distance carers can live from schools children attended. In the development of the Parental Engagement Act 2006, focus groups indicated that home-link workers had a positive impact for children looked after at home, helping to build and maintain relationships between their family and the school. From our experience, home-link workers also allow the school to better understand what parents and carers already do with their children, and how they (parents / carers) are most likely to respond positively to attempts to engage them in their children’s learning. An example of an initiative developed in response to parent / carer feedback is the use of text and social media to report regular (weekly) good news stories about children’s progress to parents or carers. Elsewhere, we are aware of a Scottish head teacher who arranged for parent-teacher meetings to take place in a pub situated near the homes of parents who had previously struggled to attend. Without systematic evaluation we cannot confirm whether such initiatives have directly improved parental engagement, but at a minimum they reflect a willingness to be flexible in approach, and responsive to need. The research would suggest that success in engaging disengaged or disadvantaged parents and carers is contingent on these qualities being at the core of a school’s approach.

**Question 3: To what extent do schools offer particular support to the parents of pupils from the most disadvantaged communities, in order to improve the attainment of those pupils?**

Our experience of school approaches to engaging and supporting parents / carers of looked after children is mixed. A recent action research project, undertaken by CELCIS in the City of Edinburgh, involved schools redesigning the way they communicated with parents of children looked after at home. From a periodic, problem-orientated model (where parents were informed of bad behaviour), the new system was built on regular, positive communication (the content focused on aspects of the child’s week which were promising). As a result, improvements in the parent’s relationships with the school were reported, and the process was also found to help teachers to focus on children’s strengths and abilities. Children were


\textsuperscript{22} Ibid, p.7
seen to be more engaged in education, which should, if maintained in the long term, have implications for their attainment.  

Such approaches are not uncommon in Scotland, but nor are they sufficiently widespread. Too often we encounter statements along the lines of ‘they [the parents] are too difficult to engage with’ or ‘they don’t want to be involved’. In a research piece for Enquire, Pilkington (2010) suggests that parents of children who are looked after away from home are often excluded from the school process entirely, because of a prevailing view that they are too ‘complex and difficult’. This results ‘in [parents] being overlooked as potentially significant contributors’ to the child’s education. Which is a serious concern when it is considered that many accommodated looked after children return to live with their parents and families before school leaving age. MacKinnon suggests that if schools and teachers could acknowledge the richness of pupils and parents backgrounds, an important ‘fund of knowledge’ would be made available to them, helping them to better engage the child in learning.  

In line with the conclusions of the DfE Evidence Review, we find schools offering particular support to disadvantaged parents and pupils are nearly always led by a head teacher who is personally committed to helping vulnerable learners, and who is determined for the school to be ‘owned’ by all parts of the community it serves. These head teachers, often supported by depute heads with responsibility for pastoral support, make partnership and multi-agency arrangements an essential component of their strategy for parental engagement. The Getting it Right approach is evident, with information shared between partners, and external expertise (such as educational psychologists) utilised strategically. 

While the extent of tailored support for disadvantaged parents (or the carers of disadvantaged pupils) is probably insufficient across Scotland as a whole, we are currently involved with a number of local authorities who are actively considering how to improve their provision for this group. Moreover, rather than simply mandating an increase in the amount of support available, these authorities are giving careful attention to the quality and form of support they provide. Investment by local authorities will be needed if they are to understand the needs of disadvantaged communities, followed up by a critical appraisal of what works to help parents and carers help children. As noted by the DfE’s review, effective parental engagement with disadvantaged communities depends on ‘strong

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leadership, clear strategic direction, collecting, monitoring and sharing data, and pro-actively engaging with and reaching out to parents and families’. 27

**Question 4: Is there evidence to demonstrate which approaches used by schools have been most successful and are these being used, as appropriate, throughout Scotland?**

A review from 1997 indicated that even the most well-planned and well-intentioned school programmes for parental engagement fail if they do not address issues of ‘parental role’ construction and parental efficacy (in relation to helping children succeed in school). 28 In informing our work with schools we therefore make reference to programmes and approaches which have shown (either in a UK or other English speaking context) significant outcomes in respect to parent / carer skills and knowledge. Examples include school based counselling services which work with child and parent / carer, paired reading schemes underpinned by a ‘parent’ tutoring element (to raise skills and confidence), and regular, positive updates from teachers on children’s progress (as used in our Edinburgh project). 29 Research from the US also indicates that special ‘home work’ clubs, where teachers and parents are both engaged in supporting the child with a specific task, not only improves the child’s academic performance, but also school-parent relations and the skills of the parent. 30

On the basis of the available literature these combined approaches to intervention, which focus on supporting both children and carers, appear to be particularly effective in improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils (when based on planning for individual needs and an understanding social and environmental context). We are currently testing their efficacy in the Scottish context through our ‘test-of-change’ projects with schools, as part of wider Scottish Government efforts to improve the involvement of parents, currently being led by the Raising Attainment for All (RAFA) team. This should provide further evidence about the success of certain approaches. But while there are gaps in the evidence base, there is now a sufficient body of information on which schools can develop their own interventions, and a number of well-evaluated ‘off-the-shelf’ approaches (particularly in relation to building home-school links). 31 The reasons why these approaches are not more widely used in Scotland (or existing approaches evaluated) is probably linked to insufficient resources (perceived and actual), a

27 Ibid, p.64
30 Jeynes, W (2012) A meta-analysis of different types of parental involvement programs for urban students, Urban Education 47(4), pp. 706 - 742
31 Please see Goodall, J & Vorhaus, J (2011) Review of best practice in parental engagement, Department of Education Research Report
lack of leadership at school and local authority levels, and attitudes of school staff.

In relation to staff attitudes, it is important to acknowledge that engaging with families from disadvantaged communities can be challenging, requiring skills and competencies not necessarily associated with classroom teaching. School teachers should not simply be required to ‘do things differently’ without appropriate development opportunities, and support from other professionals (such as community and adult teachers, family-link workers and social workers).

Furthermore, while schools have a critical role to play in improving outcomes, for the attainment gap to be closed educational inequality must be assiduously tackled at the pre-school stage. High-quality pre-school provision is consistently shown to positively influence children’s intellectual and social behavioural development, and for this reason we welcome the additional ‘early learning and childcare’ support which should now be available to every ‘looked after’ two year old under Part 6 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. We urge the Scottish Government to monitor implementation of this legislation closely, to ensure that local authorities and their partners tailor their provision so that it meets the specific educational and care needs of looked after children, and their parents and carers.

**Question 5: Has greater parental involvement in school education through the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 led to an improvement in pupil attainment?**

In 2009 Consumer Focus Scotland carried out research into the impact of the *Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006*.32 This provided some evidence that a wider group of parents were becoming engaged with schools, due to the introduction of parent councils. However, there was no relationship identified with improved pupil attainment, and in a review of the relevant academic databases we found no other research related to this specific legislation. Our expectation is that the 2006 Act has had little direct impact on student attainment, as the wider literature from parent engagement suggests that resources deployed in this form of school-parent interaction have little to no impact in terms of enhancing children’s learning; particularly for children from the most disadvantaged families.

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Question 6: Are there any new measures that could be realistically taken (for example, by the Scottish Government, local authorities, parents’ forums, the voluntary sector etc.) to help parents raise their child’s attainment?

The conclusions of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report identifies a number of ways in which schools and local authorities can better help parents and carers of children who are disadvantaged by poverty, or by being looked after. Mediating these through our experience working across Scottish local authorities, we believe the necessary measures should be:

a) Focused on developing meaningful, two-way relationships between schools and carers. Research from the US, such as the Harvard Family Research Project, have found that a positive home-school relationship can help to buffer against the negative effects of poverty, in terms of its impact on children’s language, social, motor, adaptive and basic school skills. In this model schools listen to and learn from parents / carers, and vice versa.

b) Helping to build capacity at home, through practical support for parents / carers in reading and maths. Sénéchal has found that training parents to teach their children to read is more than twice as effective as programs which encourage parents to listen to their children to read, and six times more effective than those which encourage parents to read to their children.

c) Facilitating educationally rich relationships between carer and child (through the completion of shared activities, for instance). An example of one such activity, which has shown promising results with looked after children, is ‘paired reading’. This involves a structured approach to helping carers to read with their children. A study by Osborne et al. (2010) found that the use of paired reading methods with foster carers and primary schools improved the reading age of children (on average each child in the study made one year’s progress in just over four months).

Outside of these, the University of Strathclyde’s School of Education has been engaged in a ‘literacy clinic’ with undergraduate education students, supporting

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children in a Glasgow primary school who have experienced reading difficulties. If evaluations support the approach, it would indicate the valuable contribution that undergraduate teacher education students could make to closing the attainment gap in Scotland, while also gaining professional experience and course credit.

Finally, as has been mentioned above, it is important that schools and local authorities plan and develop their parental engagement strategies on the basis of systematic assessments of parent and child need. This requires an investment of time and money, but the benefit is the selection of approaches which are meaningful to the communities they are targeted towards. Moreover, in view of the statutory requirements on Community Planning Partnerships (to develop Children’s Services Plans) these assessments would appear to be both essential and unavoidable. The Scottish Government has a key role in supporting local areas to prioritise and implement such activities, particularly through the statutory guidance currently being developed for Children’s Services Planning and the Child’s Plan. Education Scotland has a valuable contribution to make too, supporting schools to identify (and evaluate) successful approaches to parental engagement, providing practical guidance on how to develop strategies, and enabling schools across the country to learn from each other.

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to this important inquiry. We would welcome any further discussions with Committee.

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38 [http://www.strath.ac.uk/humanities/schoolofeducation/education_projects/literacy_clinic/]
Introduction

Children in Scotland welcomes the opportunity to offer our comments to the Committee’s call for evidence. We are the umbrella body for the children’s sector, including education, health, social care, early years and childcare. We have over 450 members and our staff are delivering a wide range of projects and programmes in schools and other settings, with an array of public, private and third sector partners.

Children in Scotland manage Enquire (Scotland’s advice service for additional support for learning) and Resolve (the largest ASL mediation provider in Scotland) and host NPFS, the National Parent Forum for Scotland. These, together with the participatory projects that we engage in around the country, give us direct contact with the children and young people we seek to serve and offers us an invaluable insight into the experience of Scotland’s children and young people.

Q1. Whether schools always explain clearly to parents how children learn throughout their school years and how parents could help their development.

The school’s role in explaining how children learn throughout school and encouraging parents to become involved in that process is an essential element of closing the attainment gap, yet there is as yet insufficient recognition among schools of the transformative role parents can play in supporting their child’s learning and thus narrowing the attainment gap.

Removing barriers that preclude a parent’s involvement in their child’s learning, supporting parent’s by imparting the knowledge and tools that they need to adequately support their child, and recognising the challenges that parents face (particularly parents from disadvantaged backgrounds) in helping to educate their child at home are all essential factors that must be considered.

Schools and local authorities need to continue to do as much as possible to communicate openly, effectively and positively with parents in order to encourage engagement and parental involvement. Communication, and predominantly a breakdown in it, is at the heart of the majority of enquiries to the Enquire helpline and cases dealt with by Resolve mediation service. Effective parental
involvement relies on there being good communication between stakeholders, improved mutual understanding of the roles of teachers and parents and how they best work together in the best interests of the child.

Recent successful examples can be found in Save the Children’s Family and Schools Together programme ad Childhood in Scotland’s Schools as Hubs programme supported by the STV Hunter Foundation. The former focuses on building a stronger relationship between parents and teachers, and coaching parents on how to work effectively with their children. Children in Scotland’s Schools Hubs Programme explores improving wider engagement with parents and the broader school community and illustrates 5 schools creative ways of engaging with parents and the wider community. This work is too early to be able to identify specific improvements in attainment as a direct result, however it does demonstrate increased parental involvement in the life of the school in a variety of different ways. It is however clear that this is not entirely the responsibility of the wider school and that increased inter-agency working is also important to support and facilitate this work.

However, it should be stressed that efforts to encourage information sharing between schools and parents should be the result of a clear and concerted strategy to involve parents and empower them with the information they need to support their child based on solid pedagogical evidence and research, and not approached in a piecemeal fashion.

Q2. Whether schools are always flexible enough to allow parents to be involved in their child’s education (given parents’ work commitments, for example)

There are undoubtedly a great many schools throughout Scotland that make concerted efforts to introduce a level of flexibility that would allow parents to play a full and active part in the life of the school and their child’s education. Changing work patterns generally mean the working day varies considerably for all families. This is a challenge for all schools to provide a flexible approach to engagement with parents that meets the majority of parents needs however this could also be supported by improvements in family friendly working practices.

There is evidence to suggest that there is a certain level of inconsistency in approach as to how schools meet the challenge of offering flexibility to parents who might want to become more involved in their child’s learning, both logistically and pedagogically.

Improvements in flexibility could be achieved particularly by considering the needs of specific groups of parents who do not have flexibility at short notice to attend school, including parents on low incomes, parents of children with disabilities, engagement of carers of looked after children etc. As part of a recent survey of parents of children with disabilities we also heard that the use of technology e.g. email directly to the professionals involved is helpful in addressing a more flexible contact and engagement at a time that works for them.

Acceptance of the fact that some parents experiencing severe economic hardship can lead chaotic lives that do not readily lend themselves to becoming a full and active partner in their child’s education. Greater understanding of these
circumstances and more flexibility in terms of the scheduling and rescheduling of appointments at school may help to ameliorate this concern.

Parents who utilise Enquire (Scotland’s advice service for additional support for learning), often report an unwillingness on the part of school staff to engage with learning methods and pedagogy that might have been researched by the parent. Whilst there may be questions or concerns about the educational benefits of different approaches, there still needs to be an opportunity for parents views to be heard and schools need to be able to clearly demonstrate the value of the learning and teaching approach they are adopting.

This can form the basis of a breakdown in the relationship between the parent and the school, which in turn can lead to making the task of closing the attainment gap for some of the most vulnerable children and young people more challenging, something that can be evidenced by cases addressed through Resolve mediation services.

Greater flexibility is required therefore, not just in term of logistics but in taking into consideration the views of parents who want to do all they can to support their child.

This is important, as our experience shows that there is a clear indication that children perform better when parent and school can work effectively together and share a productive working relationship.

Q3. The extent to which schools offer particular support to the parents of pupils from the most disadvantaged communities, in order to improve the attainment of those pupils

The positive impact that parental involvement can have in closing the attainment gap is substantial, and the body of evidence that suggests that the home learning environment is the critical factor in raising attainment is both voluminous and persuasive.

However, it must be recognised that as far as home support for learning is concerned, the trajectory is set very early in life, and that patterns of cognitive development and engagement with the learning process are already measurable at two, making it critically important that this engagement with parents is a continuum and starts at the earliest stages, pre-school, through early years education and care and on into school years.

Examples noted above from the CiS Schools Hubs programme and the Save the Children Family and Schools Together Programme are good examples of where schools are offering particular support to the parents from the most disadvantaged communities.

The fact is that for many parents (and especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds), school and the school environment can be associated with a number of negative connotations. It is common for parents to have children enrolled at the same school that they attended. Among younger parents in particular, it can also be the case that their children are taught by the same teaching staff that they themselves were taught by, which can often be the source of negative relationship between school and parent. It is important that this is overcome if schools are to engage positively with parents.
CPD for teachers to become better equipped at engaging parents, particularly parents who do not share their educational and social background, is important to establish an inclusive culture and ethos in our Schools and Children in Scotland. It is already working with Scottish Government and Education Scotland to support the ongoing professional development of school staff in engaging both with parents and children and young people themselves as well as raising awareness of the resources, tools and publications that currently exist to support this.

However, one possible barrier to achieving this is the fact that many parent groups around schools are not as inclusive or as representative of the school community as they should be. Encouraging the involvement of parents from a mix of socio-economic backgrounds is beneficial and specific efforts should be made to encourage a diverse membership of parent council’s and forums.

It is also essential to acknowledge that even with the best support, parental capacity is finite. For example, parents with learning disabilities, who report to our member organization Scottish Consortium for Learning Disabilities regular challenges in supporting their children particularly through written communications and formal engagement in many avenues of their life.

It is important to understand that there are no magic bullets and one size does not fit all. Each child's and family's situation is different so each school needs to understand what might work for each child and family, in their local communities, especially when they are likely to need support beyond what universal and mainstream resources can provide. We also need to be able to understand and assess risk of unequal outcomes more effectively — a child who has poor vocabulary development at two is at high risk of failing educationally, and a child whose family has not supported their early attachment and cognitive development well is likely to have poor vocabulary at two.

What is clear is that in the present austere environment that has seen a significant tightening of local authority budgets, the necessity of addressing these issues has become more pronounced, yet also more challenging.

Q5. Whether greater parental involvement in school education through the Parental Involvement Act (2006) has led to an improvement in pupil attainment

Whilst parental involvement in schools has undoubtedly improved, it is essential that we ensure that this involvement improves for all parents.

One helpful solution would be to consider what is required for effective measurement of the impact that parental involvement has on attainment, Children in Scotland would welcome work being done in this area.

Q6. Whether there are any new measures that could realistically be taken (for example, by the Scottish Government, local authorities, parents’ forums, the voluntary sector, etc) to help parents raise their child’s attainment.

In recent years there have been a number legislative and public policy interventions that have sought to address problems of disadvantage and educational attainment that continue to persist in Scotland.
Measures to promote greater levels of integration between services, encouraging joint working and information sharing between professionals and introducing increased flexibility and freedom for those working in education to make decisions have played significant part in supporting parents and children from economically deprived households.

Investment in early years education and the provision of 600 hours of free nursery education may have a transformative effect on the life chances of Scotland’s most vulnerable children and young people and give parents a valuable opportunity to re-enter the world of work.

Significant though these measures are, however, they have not focused solely and specifically on closing the educational-attainment gap, and as such, there has been insufficient progress in meeting the challenges that this represents.

Children in Scotland welcome the Scottish Government’s statement of intent outlined in the most recent Programme for Government and elsewhere to now make closing the attainment gap a public policy priority.

The Scottish Attainment Challenge and the Education (Scotland) Bill provide an invaluable opportunity to make progress, but these measures must be inclusive of all children in Scotland living in poverty – not just those who live in areas of multiple deprivation.

Likewise, a renewed effort to provide adequate and efficient support to children with additional support needs is necessary. In a climate of decreasing budgets and tightening resources, it is essential that these children, who are often most at risk of low attainment, receive the help and support that they require to flourish and reach their true potential.

Furthermore, as discussed earlier in this response, an important consideration for closing the attainment gap in Scotland is making preschool provision available at a much earlier age for children from deprived backgrounds.

While the Scottish Government provides opportunity for Looked After Children to attend preschool from the age of two, those from the poorest households do not can only start from age three and are disadvantaged as a result.

That being so, Children in Scotland would recommend that the Scottish Government consider making preschool opportunities available from the age of two for children from the most disadvantaged households.
Children in Scotland is Scotland's national agency for organisations and professionals working with and for children, young people and their families. It exists to identify and promote the interests of children and their families and to ensure that policies and services and other provisions are of the highest possible quality and are able to meet the needs of a diverse society. Children in Scotland represents over 450 members, including 90% of Scottish Local Authorities, all major voluntary, statutory and private children’s agencies, professional organisations, as well as many other smaller community groups and children’s services. It is linked with similar agencies in other parts of the UK and the European Union.

The work of Children in Scotland encompasses extensive information, policy, research and practice development programmes. The agency works closely with MSPs, the Scottish Government, local authorities and practitioners. It services a number of groups such as: the Cross Party Parliamentary Group on Children and Young People (with YouthLink Scotland) and the Scotland’s Children’s Sector Forum. Children in Scotland also hosts Enquire - the national advice service for additional support for learning, and Resolve:ASL, Scotland’s largest independent education mediation service.
1. Every child in kinship care is capable of success in learning and in life, yet too many are let down educationally by the system that is supposed to look after them. There are several factors which cause this situation:

1.1 in the first place, of course, a number of children in care have been through a lot prior to being taken into care, and this can create barriers to learning;

1.2 secondly, the school system itself does not do enough to help looked after children catch up and keep up – either because schools do not know that children are in care or because they do not know what can be done to accelerate their learning;

1.3 thirdly, children are embarrassed to admit to their teacher, or their peer group, that they have been taken into care and are living with a relative, (usually their grandparents), because of their parent/s unsuitability; [this usually involves their parent/s involvement with alcohol / drug addictions].

2. Kinship carers believe the current levels of educational attainment can be transformed if the system is changed so that the joint efforts of all those who care about the learning of these children can have maximum outcome and effect.

We, as kinship carers, propose therefore that the fundamental elements of that system should be:

2.1 in every local authority, a senior official, should rigorously track the schooling of every child in care, making sure that schools, whether primary or secondary, are aware when they have a child or children in care on their register;

2.2 the school, itself, should actively monitor the child or children’s performance and if there is cause for concern, or signs of under-attainment, then this should be brought to the attention of the kinship carer and the child’s social worker. A plan of action should be implemented to try and rectify the situation before despair sets in and the problem spins out of control;

2.2 kinship children feel isolated in school where the majority of children live and are encouraged, at home, by their natural parents. This special bond, “natural-child-to-parents”, is unfamiliar to a kinship child as they work through their feelings of rejection. Learning must be sympathetically handled by the class teacher especially if the kinship child has been removed from one school and sent to another to assist the kinship carer in their guardianship of the child.

3. There are around c.20,000 kinship care children in Scotland at any one time, although this is a changeable group as more and more children are taken into care and placed within a kinship care placement. Obviously this type of care is more favourable and offers more stability than other forms of care, but many children have experienced serious mental health issues, which are not of their own making. These kinship care children do not automatically receive access to proper treatments or therapists to deal with the abusive affects which they have suffered, resulting in their poor concentration and lack of educational attainment.
4. The truth is though, (and another factor adding to the quandary), is that many kinship children do not receive a good quality learning experience because of financial constraints placed upon their carer. Kinship carers are generally not earning and therefore cannot contribute, or subsidise, outlays for school projects and extra-curricular activities. Music lessons (plus the musical instrument), art appreciation/gallery visits, field trips/history and science outings, the list is endless, all influence a child’s ability to appreciate the willingness to learn. Children are very perceptive and deeply affected by not being able to get involved in the same activities as their peer group and this too affects their motivation to learn.

5. Although some kinship children do well, their average attainment is far worse than that of their peer group who live with their parents and are encouraged by their parents to achieve.

6. By the end of the fourth year at secondary school the achievement of a kinship child sharply declines and the gap between the kinship child and their peer group increases.

7. With the right supports in place, every child in kinship care is capable of progressing, achieving and succeeding. Taking children into care is suppose to improve their life chances, but still their outcomes remain unacceptably low because of lack of direct financial investment in a kinship child’s welfare and education.

8. As a result of the problems that have affected the lives of kinship children they could sometimes exhibit challenging behaviour. Bad behaviour and poor attendance could be improved with “good lessons” suited to the damaged child’s ability to encourage their good attendance. If these “good lessons” are provided daily, and the wider barriers to learning addressed, with perhaps encouragement and rewards for positive behaviour, this would reduce exclusions and should in turn improve the attainment of a kinship child.

9. Academically-focused study support could be directly related to the core curriculum, and could be focused on raising standards of attainment. It might include activities such as homework clubs, peer education programmes, book clubs, mentoring or catch-up sessions delivered by enthusiastic subject specialists.

10. Children in care are more likely than their peers to value the consistent personal support and attention of an “identified adult” or “mentor” who is able to understand the issues facing the child and provide advice, support and high expectations over time. Feeling valued and supported by an adult is key to promoting attainment amongst looked after children. An adult, or mentor, in every school should be concerned for the welfare and achievement of children in care so that every child feels supported, appreciated and valued.

A designated teacher should be:

10.1 responsible for co-ordinating strategies to raise the attainment of the child or young person, in particular agreeing a high quality Personal Education Plan (PEP) and creating opportunities for the kinship child, or young person, to access additional resources for learning, particularly one-to-one tuition.

10.2 a central point of contact for a kinship child to provide the link between the child, the kinship carer, social worker, senior local authority official and other children’s services.

10.3 responsible for understanding the wider needs of the looked after child or young person;

10.4 the designated teacher should agree a Personal Education Plan for each child in care;
10.5 The key mechanism for addressing the needs of the child or young person and improving their attainment is the PEP.

10.6 The key element about a PEP is that it should set high expectations of rapid progress and put in place the additional support the child or young person needs in order to succeed. The designated teacher is responsible for working with social workers to develop the PEP. Each child’s social worker should be aware of the child’s educational needs and be involved in decisions on how these should be addressed.

The designated teacher should make sure that the child’s carer is consulted throughout.

10.7 The preferences of the child should be taken into account when producing the PEP involving the young person in the design of their learning. This helps them to take ownership of their learning goals, and promotes confidence in the classroom. The designated teacher should ensure that the PEP is written, implemented, reviewed regularly and the impact assessed.

10.8 Of course, social workers and schools do not work in isolation; carers should contribute to improving attainment by creating a suitable environment for study, instilling a positive stance to learning, and maintaining regular contact with the school.

11. In conclusion therefore, the key to success is the multi combination of secure schooling, a senior official from the local authority tracking the progress of all kinship children, personalised supports at school and a kinship carer who receives an appropriate, realistic level of help and assistance that they so rightly deserve.

With this system in place, we believe that every child in care could and should flourish and in time achieve their full potential.

Lynda Maguire
For and on behalf of
Dalkeith Midlothian Kinship Carers
29 January 2015 ©
About ENABLE:

ENABLE Scotland is the largest voluntary organisation in Scotland of and for children and adults who have learning disabilities and their families. We have a strong voluntary network with around 5000 members in 44 local branches and via individual membership.

Around a third of our members have a learning disability. ENABLE Scotland campaigns to improve the lives of people who have learning disabilities and their families and carers. ENABLE Scotland provides social care services to more than 2,000 people across Scotland who have learning disabilities or mental health problems.

ENABLE Scotland believe that getting it right for all children during their school years is crucial to their future quality of life and opportunities. Our Bridging the Training Gap highlighted the need for better education for student and qualified education staff on additional support needs, equalities and inclusion. This issue persists, highlighted in both the Doran Report (review of education for children with complex needs) and Donaldson Report (review of teacher education). One of the consequences of this is the disproportionate rates of exclusions among children with additional support needs (ASN) and/or disabilities.

- The exclusion rate per 1,000 pupils, for pupils with ASN is more than 4 times higher than those who have no ASN.
- The exclusion rate per 1,000 pupils, for pupils assessed or declared as having a disability is twice as high as for those without ASN.
- Rates of exclusion among pupils attending special schools is high at 148 per 1,000 compared to 58 per 1,000 in secondary and 10 per 1,000 in primary.
- So-called ‘informal exclusions’ continue to be common practice despite being unlawful. The Children’s Commissioner in England produced a report on exclusions (They Never Give Up On You, 2012) that suggested the practice is widespread in England. Anecdotal evidence suggests that in Scotland the situation is no better.

50% of families surveyed by Contact a Family (in England) said that they were unable to work because of constant informal exclusions. Other effects of this practice included: children becoming depressed, falling behind with school work and feeling isolated; conflict between parents and school; changing schools.
ENABLE Scotland believes therefore that truly inclusive education is not a reality for many children with ASN and still needs to be tackled.

ENABLE delivers a range of programmes in schools and colleges across Scotland to support young people with additional support needs to make a successful post-school transition to a positive destination, for example our Stepping Up programme which is highlighted in the Wood report as an example of best practice.

ENABLE Scotland has a Young Families Support Committee, made up largely of parents and family carers of children and young people with a learning disability. We regularly consult with this group to keep us informed of issues impacting on families with disabled children. Parent members of the Young Families Support Committee have informed our response to the Committee.

Our response is informed by ENABLE Scotland’s Getting it Right from the Start research due to be published in May 2015.

Questions:

1. **Whether schools always explain clearly to parents how children learn throughout their school years and how parents could help their development (e.g. with reading and wider literacy approaches):**

   ENABLE Scotland would like to share with the Committee the views of one parent member of the Young Families Support Committee as an example of the experience of parents of children with learning disabilities:

   "We had various planning and transition meetings with Educational psychologist, school etc. but little was said about the process of learning or how that could / should / would be adapted to allow J to access the curriculum and achieve the best learning outcome for him. Focus was on helping him be settled and managing his behaviour (Which wasn’t bad) and helping him learn social skills. I don’t remember any focus on strategies for us as parents to support learning at home. J is on split placement between communication unit and mainstream school.”

   The Committee should be aware that in regards to the experience of parents of children with learning disabilities, this comment is, unfortunately, fairly typical.

   ENABLE Scotland would highlight to the Committee that children with learning disabilities face additional challenges in education. For parents too this can be an extremely difficult time. One parent that participated in research by ENABLE Scotland used the following words to describe their feelings:

   "It’s hard to put your child into an environment that you know doesn’t get it, and it’s like putting your child into the lion’s den, knowing that, there’s a good chance he’s going to get hurt, because he doesn’t understand the hidden social curriculum, he doesn’t understand about what you should and shouldn’t do to be a friend, and things like that/”

   Research conducted by ENABLE Scotland highlighted a clear feeling that parents and professionals should be working together collaboratively to meet the educational needs of the child. Parent experiences, shared in this research, suggested that the professionals should be interacting and communicating better with parents; that parents’ opinions need to be valued and not treated as an inconvenience.
“Changes need to happen, professionals need to respect parents – all professionals need to respect parents, and listen to them, and not dismiss them as, you don’t know what you’re talking about, I’m the professional here. And I was hoping that GIRFEC would do that, but it’s taking a while to filter down.”

ENABLE Scotland would highlight that a child’s learning experience would be enhanced if schools were able to help parents to support their child’s learning and development at home. However, it is our experience that for many teachers and pupil support assistants there is training gap in their own understanding of how the learning and development of a child with a learning disability differs from their non-disabled peers.

2. **Whether schools are always flexible enough to allow parents to be involved in their child’s education (given parents’ work commitments, for example):**

In response to this question ENABLE Scotland would draw on the experience of one parent member:

“We get invited to 3 x ½ hour meetings a year to discuss J’s STINT (Staged Intervention Plan) and look at how things are going. Typically attendees will include a teacher from schools, Education psychologist, and special needs coordinator from mainstream school. We talked about J but little said to support learning style etc. and how to make it accessible for him. All strategies tend to focus on things that do not require equipment or staffing presumably due to resource constraints.”

“Meetings are short (30 mins) and therefore can only cover a short agenda with little or no time to discuss anything outwith J’s STINT plan.”

Parents tell us that they would like to be more involved in their child’s education, particularly with regard to supporting their child’s learning needs by sharing effective strategies with the teacher to ensure consistency between home and school. However the perception is often that teachers don’t always take the time to listen to parents and don’t treat parents as partners in their child’s education.

3. **The extent to which schools offer particular support to the parents of pupils from the most disadvantaged communities, in order to improve the attainment of those pupils:**

ENABLE Scotland would suggest to the Committee that particular support should be offered to families where either the child or the parents have a disability, in order to improve the attainment of those pupils.

Families with disabled members are more likely to experience poverty. Welfare reforms have hit households with disabled adults and children with an average reduction of £1,900 per year in annual income. This is three times the reduction experienced by non-disabled households. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has calculated that the cumulative impacts of welfare reforms has led to 500,000 more children falling into absolute poverty in the UK, 325,000 of them disabled children.

Combined with the cognitive, emotional, physical and sometimes behavioural challenges that impact on their educational outcomes, children with disabilities are often also affected by poverty for a number of reasons.
Families with disabled children are more likely to be living in poverty due to the considerable additional costs of raising a disabled child (e.g. aids and adaptations, treatments, therapies, travelling to hospital and GP appointments or to a special school, special diets, special nappies etc.) In fact it is estimated that it costs 3 times more to raise a disabled child than a non-disabled child.\(^1\) Many parents of disabled children go without essentials themselves in order to pay bills and provide what their children need.\(^2\) This causes anxiety, worry and stress, impacting upon parents’ own mental and physical wellbeing. The difficulties of combining employment with the responsibility of caring for a disabled child add to the likelihood that this group of families will be disadvantaged financially.

Despite this families with disabled children report that they have to “fight” for the right level of support for their child at school. The perception is that this is often due to scarce resources and budgetary constraints. ENABLE Scotland would link the disproportionate exclusion rates for children with Additional Support Needs and/or a disability with a support deficit. Exclusions impact on both child and parent.

Research by ENABLE Scotland, Getting it Right from the Start 2015, highlights the substantial role school can play in providing support for parents of children with learning disabilities. 70% of parents cited the school/education sector as a source of support. Many parents responding cited teachers and head teachers as the primary source of day to day support for the child and the parents:

“Once he was in school, we kind of lost touch with the professionals (health and social work), so it’s really the school just dealing directly. I would say the deputy head or his teachers at the school, because that’s my main point of contact now for all A’s needs. I don’t really have a professional that comes to the house or deals with A anymore – all that is now being handled at the school.”

4. **Whether there is evidence to demonstrate which approaches used by schools have been most successful and whether these are being used, as appropriate, throughout Scotland:**

ENABLE Scotland’s research, Getting it Right from the Start 2015 identified Child and Parent focussed support as a model of good practise. Most of the professionals interviewed were clear that although the child is the focus of services, supporting parents was a vital part of the big picture.

“It was 50:50…You’re supporting the child in school, but, actually, you’re supporting the parents outwith that.”

Professionals felt that within a child centred education system, their role includes managing support for the parents as well.

ENABLE Scotland would suggest that as the Education Sector is such a significant source of support for parents of children with learning disabilities. Education professionals need to be further equipped with capabilities of supporting both children with learning disabilities and their parents. Ensuring examples of good practise become universal.

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\(^1\) Contact a Family (2012), Counting the Cost 2012: the financial reality for families with disabled children across the UK.

\(^2\) Contact a Family (2014), Counting the Cost 2014: Research into the finances of more than 3,500 families with disabled children across the UK.
Children are all individuals and their support needs should be assessed on an individual basis, however it would be helpful to have a shared database of good practice. The Autism Toolbox and Dyslexia Toolkit are good examples of what can be achieved in this respect but are of course specific to those conditions and therefore limited in scope.3,4

5. **Whether greater parental involvement in school education through the Parental Involvement Act (2006) has led to an improvement in pupil attainment:**

One parent told us said, on the Parental Involvement Act (2006), that it is: “Not mentioned or discussed. General statements only that parental involvement helps.”

According to Scottish Government statistics5, the attainment of pupils with learning disabilities has increased from an average tariff score of 55 in 2009/10 to 78 in 2011/12. Whether this is due to greater parental involvement in their child’s education is impossible to say.

In our experience, when parents are actively engaged with their child’s learning and supported to do so by the school, this can have a positive impact on attainment. However we are aware that the opposite is also true - limiting expectations on the part of parents, schools, or both can have a detrimental impact on attainment. If the child is not encouraged to reach their potential, (whatever that might be), they will not be motivated to learn and will not aspire to achieve their goals in life.

6. **Whether there are any new measures that could realistically be taken (for example, by the Scottish Government, local authorities, parents’ forums, the voluntary sector, etc) to help parents raise their child’s attainment.**

Any new measures should involve meaningful participation by parents in planning their child’s support for learning and in decisions relating to their child’s education. This participation should be on an individual basis between parent(s) or carer(s) and class teacher AND on a more formal, collective basis through parent forums/councils.

There is already legislation in place to try to ensure that the views of parents are listened to and taken into account; however practice on the ground does not always reflect this. As stated previously, parents need to feel that they are truly valued by schools as partners in supporting their child’s education.

Parents of children with learning disabilities also need to be supported to understand how their child learns and how they might be supported to achieve their goals. Parents and carers should also be fully informed about the range of options available for their young person on leaving school. Attainment in school is currently focussed on discrete academic qualifications that allow pupils to access Higher Education. For young people who have a learning disability, qualifications, whilst important, do not reflect the full breadth of achievement in terms of the range of skills developed in school or readiness to progress beyond school. Implementation of the Wood Report would see the definition of attainment in school fundamentally challenged, broadening it to encompass vocational skills and readiness to progress into industry.

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3 [http://www.autismtoolbox.co.uk/](http://www.autismtoolbox.co.uk/)
5 Implementation of the Education (ASL) (Scotland) Act 2004 Report to Parliament (April 2014)
“This is a particular concern of mine as 16 is not too far away in the future for L and yet there still seems to be a tendency in education to get ASN kids to 16 with the bare minimum of qualifications and allow them to leave school. A lot of their capabilities are assumed and I still don’t think there is enough done to explore their talents and develop them into a chosen career path. I also don’t think age and stage of development is considered at all, it’s like “oh you’re 16? Off you go then and be an adult!” I certainly know in my case, L will not be ready for the adult world at 16.”

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Educational attainment gap - Involvement of parents: response from Families Outside

As Scotland’s only national charity that works solely to support the families of people affected by imprisonment, Families Outside would like to highlight the needs of a particularly vulnerable group of parents and carers, namely those who are in custody on remand or sentence or on Home Detention Curfew (HDC), and those who are caring for children and young people with a parent or close relative in prison.

Families Outside would like to highlight the following to the Committee in considering how parents and schools can best work together to raise all pupils’ attainment:

- A parent in prison is still a parent¹ and can play an important role in supporting their child’s education, even from behind bars. Involving an imprisoned parent in his or her child’s education need not be a burdensome task for schools. It is not unusual nowadays for schools to send out multiple copies of school reports (in cases of separated or divorced parents, for example), and this could easily be extended to a parent in prison. Newsletters, school photographs and examples of good work can all help the parent in prison to connect meaningfully with their child’s life at school and can in turn help increase the parent’s overall sense of wellbeing and motivation as well as help to improve their own literacy skills. Moreover, a relationship with a child which continues and develops during imprisonment is far more likely to be sustained post-release, giving the imprisoned parent a powerful incentive to re-engage positively in society.²

- Families affected by imprisonment are often reluctant to access support from outside agencies.³ This may be due to shame and stigma, a lack of knowledge of what support is available, or in some cases, a mistrust of statutory services. Schools, however, should be communities where families already have an established relationship with members of staff who can provide information and support in how to access other agencies. In this way, schools can be a gateway to further support and are less ‘threatening’ for families than contacting social services directly, for example.

- The Curriculum for Excellence recognises that strong home / school links are crucial to children attending regularly and reaching their potential; children do better at school and are more likely to reach their potential when parents and school staff cooperate and work closely in partnership with one another. This is particularly challenging for families affected by imprisonment who, as well as experiencing grief and shock, also fear further stigmatisation, and it is understandable that they often

avoid telling the school directly, particularly if they are unsure how that information might be used. Carers and imprisoned parents may have had very negative experiences of school themselves, many of them experiencing failure and shame, and it is extremely important that families are able to trust the school before divulging such sensitive information. A school community must, therefore, first and foremost be concerned with ensuring that all staff members are trained and have an understanding of the trauma and stigma experienced by these children so that they can support families in an appropriate and helpful way and so that carers have a fundamental trust in the school which enables them to share the information in the first place.

- Examples of positive practice exist that help improve engagement more generally between prisoner parents and their children but also to improve these children’s and parents’ engagement with education. Homework clubs such as the one at HMP Low Moss improve contact between imprisoned parents and their children as well as children’s engagement in their education. It also creates a non-stigmatising means for prisoners to improve their own literacy and numeracy. In addition, Families Outside’s school/prison link initiative offers an opportunity for parents, schools, and prisons to work together in supporting pupils’ educational attainment. There are several examples from Australia and the United States which highlight the positive role schools can play in supporting families affected by imprisonment, and these could easily be developed for use in Scotland.

- Finally, prisoners have no access to the internet and often have literacy issues. Any communication or materials intended to inform or engage with parents needs to take these factors into account. Furthermore, parents on Home Detention Curfew might have restrictions (e.g. locations/times) that limit their ability to attend meetings.

In conclusion, there are several practical ways in which schools can support parents in prison, or on HDC, and the carers of children affected by imprisonment to raise pupils’ attainment:

- ensure that all school staff are aware and trained in how to deal with issues around imprisonment;
- be a community that is aware and supportive of children affected by imprisonment – a ‘safe space’ where children and their carers can share what is going on;
- actively build positive relationships with families affected by imprisonment and help carers to access additional forms of support;
- provide information for children and families affected (posters, leaflets, helpline numbers);

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• liaise with partner agencies (sharing information appropriately and sensitively whilst bearing in mind the family’s right to confidentiality); and
• where appropriate, keep the parent in prison informed (copies of school reports, newsletters, phone calls, visits if possible etc.) in liaison with outside carers and prison staff (e.g. Family Contact Officers).

The following case study demonstrates the difference that can be made if parents, schools, and prisons work together in partnership:

Following an in-prison CPD session for teachers, which was facilitated by Families Outside, a teacher contacted us to ask if he could conduct a course choice interview with the father of one of his pupils whose father is serving a prison sentence. The Families Outside Family Support Coordinator was able to liaise with prison staff and arrange for the teacher and his pupil to meet with the pupil’s father in the prison to talk about his studies and which subjects he would choose for S3/4. This meeting had several positive impacts:

- The teacher realised that a father in prison still has an important role to play in supporting his son’s education;
- The father gained a better understanding of the school system and, more importantly, of his son’s potential;
- The pupil was delighted that his father could participate in such an important decision; and
- Families Outside was able to offer ongoing support to the pupil’s mother and her family.

Since January 2013, Families Outside has taken over 850 teachers into prisons to help them understand the issues faced by families and how they can help. These sessions have made a considerable impact on staff and have led to some creative and innovative ways of reaching out to some of Scotland’s most vulnerable families. The 2014 report can be read at www.familiesoutside.org.uk/prison-training-teachers.

March, 2015
Sarah Roberts, Child & Family Support Manager
The Fostering Network is the UK’s leading charity for all those involved in fostering committed to raising the standards of care for children and young people who are in foster care and for those leaving foster care. The Fostering Network is a membership organisation and the membership in Scotland includes more than 4,000 fostering households, all local authorities and all Registered Fostering Providers.

The Fostering Network is pleased to have the opportunity to comment in response to the Education and Culture Committee’s inquiry into how parents and schools can best work together to raise all pupils’ attainment, particularly those whose attainment is lowest. Our evidence relates to the crucial role that foster carers have in supporting children and young people to achieve the very best possible outcomes.

We believe that foster carers should be recognised as ‘first educators’ of the child or young person in their care. We need to ensure foster carers are trained, supported and empowered to proactively support children to achieve their potential.

We know that many foster carers along with many birth parents never achieved in education and schools can be intimidating places. Many parents and carers may feel inadequate to help children in new topics and areas of learning. Some will find computers challenging. If we are going to help the lowest achievers to do better, we believe teachers and whole schools need to invite parents whose children are in foster care, along with foster carers to get the chance to go over lessons and materials first and help the parent/carer to gain more confidence so that they can in turn help their child to learn.

We are currently running 2 key programmes which may be of significant interest for the Education and Culture Committee:

1 - London Fostering Achievement:

Evidence suggests that schools can find it ‘hard to reach’ some foster carers. Foster carer engagement with schools, whilst challenging, can be key to improving outcomes for children in care.

The Fostering Network and Cardiff Metropolitan University conducted a study of foster carers’ experiences and opinions with regard to children’s educational achievement. Respondents clearly identified systemic barriers, including low aspiration for the children - something they struggle to counter, a problematic relationship with other professionals

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involved in their care, and lack of knowledge or experience on their part in how to support children, particularly through to higher education.

These findings were supported by surveys run by The Fostering Network in March 2014\(^3\) in London, where foster carers highlighted a need for greater information and support. For example, 40% of respondents felt teachers did not understand the foster carer role. Whilst 48% had received no educational training, 82% of those that had received educational training felt it helped them to support fostered children’s achievement.

London Fostering Achievement is a programme which was set up in response to these findings in July 2014, led by The Fostering Network and funded through the Mayor’s London Schools Excellence Fund. There are early indications that multi-agency training, peer support and direct work with schools can help to address some of the barriers foster carers face and promote engagement in education.

To date, the programme has:

- **Worked with 32 local authorities to set up half-day education training sessions** to bring together foster carers with social workers, educational professionals and other members of the team around the child. Each training session is co-delivered by a foster carer and covers roles and responsibilities, how to maximise the impact of a personal education plan and practical ways for foster carers to support learning.

- **Recruited 10 foster carers to be Education Champions** in five pilot areas, providing informal one to one peer support to other foster carers to boost their knowledge and confidence around education. The Education Champions are also working with fostering services and Virtual Schools to help shape and advise on local provision. For example, two Champions have worked with their school improvement service to offer foster carers taster courses in phonics and maths.

- **Started working directly with 27 schools through Achievement for All**, The Fostering Network’s delivery partner on the programme. Achievement for All is an educational charity with a significant track record of increasing achievement across their established programme. For London Fostering Achievement, they have adapted their evidence-based framework to tailor it to meet the needs of children looked after. Achievement for All promote a whole school approach, boost child and carer engagement through structured conversations and encourage schools to undertake a STEEP analysis to identify barriers to education and potential solutions for this group.

The early indications from participant feedback suggests that London Fostering Achievement is having a positive impact. The programme is being externally evaluated by the Rees Centre at Oxford University and the Centre for Child and Family Research at Loughborough University. The final report will be issued towards the end of 2015.

We welcome the opportunity to share the learning of this programme with the Education and Culture Committee and to consider the possibility of piloting a similar initiative in Scotland.

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\(^3\) Online survey March 2014, 65 respondents, representing highly engaged foster carers
2 - Fostering Achievement (FA) in Northern Ireland

FA is a project of the Fostering Network in Northern Ireland and is funded by the Health and Social Care Board. The FA scheme provides direct educational provision to children and young people in foster care and is contracted to provide directly to at least 1300 children in foster care each year. In addition to direct educational provision, the scheme delivers a summer programme of activities, achievement awards events in each of the five HSCT areas, delivers the Letterbox Club and associated activities provides training workshops (2-4 per trust area each year) as well as delivering a range of other events which encourage educational engagement, including advocacy work to support foster carers on issues of educational importance and relevance, this can include accompanying carers to school and providing workshops for carers on educational matters.

A key component of the programme is the range of educational material, activities and services offered to children in foster care, including:

- Computers and software for children within their foster home
- Tuition at home
- Sports equipment and funding for classes/clubs
- Music equipment and lessons
- Arts, drama and dance equipment and lessons
- Educational materials – little buddy and study buddy packs of learning games.
- EAL packs – resources to support learning for children with English as a second language
- Driving lessons – initially 10 lessons and theory test, once theory test passed we fund 20 more lessons and the driving test.
- Outdoor activities – part funding for school trips, weekly activity or residential teen adventure summer scheme
- Summer schemes funding
- Gym membership
- Horse-riding lessons
- Family passes – W5, Belfast Zoo, National Trust, Streamvale Farm
- Year 11 GCSE study plan - currently piloting a GCSE study plan which includes assessment, study skills and planning and tutoring for some young people.
- Training workshops for foster carers on ‘understanding the curriculum’, anti-bullying, supporting young people to apply to University, etc.
• Primary Summer Scheme- age 8-11, one week duration. Focus on fun learning and socialising

• Teen Adventure- age 13-17- three night activity based residential

• University of Ulster Residential- age 14-17, focus on giving young people a taste of University Life

• Achievement Awards-

• We run these in the 5 Trust areas, once per year. A celebration event about what the young people have accomplished.

Both of the above mentioned Fostering Achievement programmes are having a significant impact on educational outcomes for children and young people in foster care, with foster carers commenting on their increased confidence in supporting children and young people with the curriculum.

We would welcome the opportunity to share the findings more fully with the Education & Culture Committee and to consider the possibilities of how such a programme maybe piloted within a Scottish context.

Sara Lurie

Director for Scotland, the Fostering Network

23 March 2015
Submission from Colin Hunter, Retired teacher.

I am pleased to be able to contribute to this consultation although I am afraid it is rather at the last minute!

I am aware that this issue is being looked at in the context of a considerable number of measures announced in recent times, namely:

The Access to Education Fund - 13 June 2014

The Third Sector Early Intervention Fund and Strategic Funding Partnerships - 16 June 2014

The Scottish Attainment Challenge backed by The Attainment Scotland Fund - 9 February 2015

I understand that this Challenge draws on the experience of the London Challenge and is aimed at literacy, numeracy, health and well being in Primary Schools.

I believe that there are also 2 further programmes, The Raising Attainment for All Programme, June 2014, and the School Improvement Partnership Programme, launched in 2013.

With regard to the 6 guide questions I hope the following brief observations may be helpful.

Explaining to parents how children learn.

I am sure there will be a great deal of variation in how effectively schools do this and it will depend on the audience each school is reaching out to. Of my own 3 children each one had a different approach to learning and in their cases each one did go on to university.

Flexibility in allowing parental involvement.

As part of the main 3 influences, child, school and parent(s), it is most important to try to have a variety of ways of involving parents to allow as many as possible to be part of a partnership approach to learning. To overcome commitments that can make this difficult, for both the parents and for school staff, more than just a parents evening or invites to assemblies, although important, would be helpful. The help of the Parent Council in reaching out to engage parents and the provision of crèche facilities, which would assist a single parent or parent/carer whose partner is away from home, to make contact with the school could be considered.

Support for parents of pupils from disadvantaged communities.

I see this as breaking a cycle which all too often is perpetuated through the generations. It would be interesting to know the statistics on the decrease or increase over the years of the number of people who are considered to be living in deprived communities. In my early years of teaching in a school which served an area which would be considered to have high levels of deprivation I gained some
insight to the conditions affecting pupils in their homes when delivering and collecting animals from an animal club at the start and end of the school holidays. There was an amazing amount of variation and this school has a Radio 4 presenter and an MSP amongst its former pupils.

Part of the reason for mentioning the above is that for most teachers the home background is largely an unknown and a multi-agency approach is I feel essential to help create the environment needed for the efforts of an effective school to be successful. This I notice is what Question 6 addresses.

Personally I do not have ready access to the evidence and statistics required to address Questions 4 and 5.

I hope that Question 6 is answered by some of the final observations I am going to make.

There is no doubt that parental support for a child's learning is vital. With all the evidence which points to the first years of life setting patterns which continue throughout life providing additional support as early as possible must be most likely to pay dividends. Inclusive community activities for toddlers and parents can do a great deal to help in the early years. Libraries are doing more to provide regular sessions for stories and rhyme which lets people socialise/network and other agencies can/could use sessions like these to reach out to the community. It is of course the gap that opens up between those whose life is rich in experience and those whose life is blighted, perhaps by a number of factors. The big challenge is surely how to marshall resources in a cost effective way and to determine how schools are best able to contribute.

My own experience is that especially in the early years almost all parents want to see their children succeed. The vision possessed by parents varies greatly and a so do the resources at their disposal. It used to be books but now electronic devices have to be added to the list of factors in play for learning. It is likely that it is at a fairly early age the children overtake the ability of the older generations on the use of electronic devices for learning. This could be a good thing if parents can encourage the youngsters to teach them techniques for e learning! For some children, even some at Primary School level, tutoring comes into play and academic results at some schools owe a lot to this type of support! It will also add to the gap between pupils from different backgrounds.

It will be important in assessing how successful any measures taken are that not just academic attainment features. As well as academic qualifications and the destinations of school leavers it would be useful to look for a reduction in self harming, drug abuse and mental health problems amongst the young and also uptake of sport, volunteering, cultural activities and other pursuits which indicate society offers a good quality of life for school leavers. This will require communities, Councils and agencies to work efficiently in these times of financial constraint to at least maintain community facilities.

I suppose this is just scratching the surface of an issue which has persisted for generations but it is good that a country which values education highly is addressing
the issue.
Summary of Includem’s evidence

Includem argues that young people are ready to learn when they are emotionally stable, with positive relationships in their lives and when they are encouraged and supported to attend school regularly. We believe that the family life of young people is as important to their engagement with education as any factor within school. Building family resilience and developing parental skills are crucial to better outcomes for young people – and for raising attainment.

About Includem

Includem is a charity which helps some of Scotland’s most vulnerable and challenging young people to achieve positive change in their behaviour and relationships and move towards leading fulfilling lives. We are there 24/7 and believe young people are never beyond help. By achieving better results for them, we also reduce public spending in the immediate and long term.

What Includem does

Includem is a specialist provider which works through commissioned arrangements to provide services for vulnerable young people and their families in their own homes and communities. We deliver targeted, personalised services out with school hours with one to one support at evenings and weekends alongside access to a 24 hour support framework.

Our work is focused on our experience that young people are willing to engage with education only when they are emotionally stable and they have positive relationships in their lives. By working in a targeted way not just with the young people but their families we can put in place a structure around school attendance and engagement.

The attainment gap in Scotland will not reduce with more in school interventions alone. To raise attainment resources need to be invested into improving child/parent relationships, child/school relationships and parent/school relationships. Identifying and addressing the underlying causes of why young people do not engage is fundamental.

Our approach is underpinned by the Getting It Right For Every Child principle of making sure that all young people and their families have consistent, coordinated support, when they need it. We have a consistent approach with families focusing on practical and emotional support to help parents establish new school routines, challenge negative behaviours and strengthen relationships.
The key elements of the work with young people and their parents/carers are:

- Practical support to ensure school attendance such as reinforcing bed times, getting up routines etc;
- Proactive work with parents to set boundaries and manage difficult behaviour at home;
- Work with parents to access help for health, housing, finance and other problems which undermine their own parenting capacity and the young person’s family and home life;
- Work with parents on their attitudes to education and responsibilities – giving them the confidence to engage with education;
- Age and stage appropriate support for the child out with school hours which develops and reinforces attendance and engagement as well as confidence, motivation and ability to participate in school work.

An evaluation in 2013\(^1\) found the key outcomes of our work were:

- Improved levels of attendance at school and lower number of exclusions from school due to disruptive behaviours;
- Improved relationships between parents/carers and school;
- Less tension in families as a result of children being at school during the day;
- Less anti-social and risk taking behaviours by young people.

Parental involvement in education

We welcome the Committee’s focus on the important role parents and carers play in supporting their children to engage to the fullest of their ability in education.

We would argue however that it is important to make a distinction between those interventions which offer practical support to parents and carers in the home and those policies which are aimed at getting parents involved in the life of the school. For many young people the fundamental barrier to their engagement in education is a lack of stable, supportive family life.

Parents and carers should be much more involved in the education process but involvement alone will not tackle the root causes of why young people do not engage – that requires targeted support to change behaviours and improve relationships.

For further information please contact Michael Shanks, Communications and Policy Manager on 0141 427 0523 or michael.shanks@includem.co.uk.

\(^1\) [http://www.includem.org/content/publications/Working-With-Families-Review-.pdf](http://www.includem.org/content/publications/Working-With-Families-Review-.pdf)
Submission from Maggie Leung

Below is my response to the questions you posed regarding educational attainment gap - involvement of parents.

1. whether schools always explain clearly to parents how children learn throughout their school years and how parents could help their development (e.g. with reading and wider literacy approaches);

**ANSWER** Since the level A-E attainments have been scrapped, I feel that parents are now far less aware of how their children are developing academically. The new way of providing this information to parents (ie. Early, First, Second, Third and Fourth) is very vague. To be told that my child is working at the 'First level' which the guidelines tell means 'to the end of p4 but earlier or later for some' really doesn't tell me anything at all about where she is academically. I think the old system was far more effective. My two teenage children worked their way through these levels and I felt that I was far more aware of their academic level of ability. I also felt that it provided good solid guidelines for teachers to work with, especially in numeracy. For instance, if a child sat Maths level C in p6 and hadn't quite achieved it, the teacher could pinpoint areas of weakness and work in partnership with the parents to rectify this.

2. whether schools are always flexible enough to allow parents to be involved in their child's education (given parents’ work commitments, for example)

**ANSWER** Parent workshops, where teachers give information to parents on how they can help their child at home, are often held straight after school when lots of parents are working. If Glasgow City Council allowed schools to use the building in the evening without charging for the let, this might allow the school to hold evening workshops.

3. the extent to which schools offer particular support to the parents of pupils from the most disadvantaged communities, in order to improve the attainment of those pupils;

**ANSWER** I don't think the schools have the resources to do this.

4. Whether there is evidence to demonstrate which approaches used by schools have been most successful and whether these are being used, as appropriate, throughout Scotland;

**ANSWER** East Renfrewshire give feedback to parents regarding their child's attainment levels. I believe that they give information to parents (via report cards) in the form of test marks and also give information on school achievement levels and national achievement levels in the areas of literacy and numeracy. These provide benchmarks for teachers, parents and pupils. Most schools in Glasgow City Council (where my child attends school) have not adopted this policy. Parents are very much in the dark. I know parents, whose children have moved on to high school in recent years and been told that their child is not working at the level of maths/english that would be expected when entering high school. These parents where completely
unaware that this was the case, believing that their children were achieving the academic level appropriate for their age and stage.

5. whether greater parental involvement in school education through the Parental Involvement Act (2006) has led to an improvement in pupil attainment;

**ANSWER:** I think that the level of parental involvement in school education will differ considerably between schools and even between teachers within schools. The cfe framework provides greater flexibility, but with that comes greater differences in how that is delivered.

6. whether there are any new measures that could realistically be taken (for example, by the Scottish Government, local authorities, parents’ forums, the voluntary sector, etc) to help parents raise their child’s attainment.

**ANSWER:** Providing parents with accurate information on their child's attainment would be the first steps that would have to be taken. Parents needs to be aware that their child's level of attainment is falling below national standards before they can help their child. East Renfrewshire and some other councils have already put this into place. The Scottish Government needs to make it a legal requirement rather than a recommendation that parents are given this information by schools. Perhaps schools could send out questionnaires to parents’ forums to find out how other parents feel about this. Do other parents feel that they have enough knowledge about their child's attainment levels? Initiatives such as homework clubs could be set up, with older pupils (primary and secondary school) helping younger pupils with their work and parents also being invited along to be part of this.
Review of research on family engagement in education:
Addressing the achievement gap

Report

A partnership between CRFR and Children in Scotland
Commissioned by the Scottish Government
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This report was written by Kelly Sheill-Davies and Sarah Morton, and edited by Kirsten Thomlinson from the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR)
1. Introduction

The introduction of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 aimed to not only increase parents’ participation in their own children’s educational experiences but to also become invested in the wider educational community. It has been suggested that we need to progress from parental involvement in schools to parental engagement in children’s learning (Goodall and Montgomery 2013). Parental engagement in children’s learning is only one factor of many that influences their educational attainment; however, it is particularly significant, and evidence suggests that among the non-school factors of school achievement like socio-economic background, parents’ educational attainment, family structure, ethnicity and parental engagement, it is the latter which is the most strongly connected to achievement and attainment (Harris and Goodall 2008). This review therefore concentrates on effective engagement strategies that will help to reduce the attainment gap between children and young people from more and less advantages backgrounds.

Key points:

• Forming a school-family partnership, particularly one that is effectively situated within the context of community agents of children’s wellbeing, requires shared goals, shared contributions, and shared accountability between parents and schools.

• Parental engagement is not confined to the visible presence and actions of parents and family within the physical space of schools – for many families may find direct engagement with schools intimidating or difficult – but still participate extensively in their children’s learning at home and in the community.

• Considering the educational experiences and outcomes of children as a shared endeavour between families and schools requires better understanding the models, mechanisms, and services that can help narrow the attainment gap amongst Scottish children and young people. This gap in achievement is experienced asymmetrically, with disadvantaged pupils more commonly assessed as at the lower levels of attainment.

• There is no singular model or programme of family engagement guaranteed to narrow the achievement gap and increase the involvement of all children’s parents. Every school must adapt the strategies and interventions included in this report to the needs of their own community, school, pupils, and parents and carers.

This review aimed to produce a high quality, accessible evidence review of educational intervention research on family engagement. The outputs from this review are focused on providing support to teachers and schools on how they can use their existing assets to improve the attainment and achievement of disadvantaged pupils. This report consists of a methodology section followed by six thematic sections which formed the website content.

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1 Please note: parental engagement here refers to engagement of a parent or carer of either gender. The positive effects of this type of engagement are not affected by family structure.
2. Methodology
This review and resulting website content and supporting guidance materials resulted from a partnership between the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR) and Children in Scotland. Scottish Government commissioned both organisations to undertake a purposive review of parental engagement in education, with a particular focus on closing gaps in attainment for disadvantaged pupils. Two key starting points for this review was a literature review of best practice in parental engagement in education recently completed for the Department for Education (Goodall and Vorhaus 2011) and a rapid review of parental engagement and narrowing the attainment gap produced by the National Foundation of Educational Research (Grayson 2013).

Review Phase 1
It was decided that this review would focus on studies of interventions, services, strategies, and determinant of parental engagement in education that were published between 2008 and 2014. This ensured that the evidence would be relatively recent while also allowing a broad enough time period in order to locate enough sources from which to collate useful findings. The first phase of the search strategy was carried out via the University of Edinburgh ‘Searcher’ Discovery Service which searches across all the University’s library resources, including the Library catalogue, e-books, e-journals, library databases and theses to identify literature for the review. Various combinations of the following terms were entered to obtain results:

- parent*
- famil*
- engage*
- school*
- learn*
- attain*
- achiev*
- disparit*
- inequ*
- involve*
- home-school*

A total of eighteen separate search combinations were run with the same parameters of publication dates between 2008 and 2014, and result sources to be included were academic journals, electronic resources, books, e-books, theses/dissertations, conference papers, and reviews. The different combinations yielded a wide-range of results equalling approximately 3750 results.

Review Phase 2
The next step was to review the first round of results and actively choose results according to their title and key words. A total of 248 entries were chosen from this first step. Next the reviewer screened all the selected literature and excluded those items that did not meet the review parameters based on their abstracts. This yielded 138 search results that passed on to the final
inclusion stage, consideration of the remaining items’ quality and relevance to the review, determined by appraising the full text of each result.

Exclusions were applied for a variety of reasons, including a lack of rigour or applicability to the reviews’ aims. When there was any question as to whether or not a study should be included, as this was a collaborative project, partners’ input was obtained. A summary of the reasons for excluding results in the second round of reviewing are that the studies focused on:

- Preschool children or programmes focusing on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)
- Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- Children with ADD/ADHD, learning disabilities, physical disabilities, or chronic illness
- Post-school transitions
- School engagement of children (unless it was considered in conjunction with parental engagement)
- Parental involvement in terms of governance
- Geographical areas or cultural orientations that are too particular for applicability

Studies focusing on these issues were excluded given the very constrained timescale of the project and the need for a relatively sharply defined profile.

Geographically, the review used both UK based studies and evaluations as well as those of an international nature. Although the US produces a comparatively large amount of research on family engagement and children’s academic outcomes, some of these studies were too culturally or demographically specific to be generalizable to the Scottish context. Likewise, many of the international results were excluded because of the lack of transferability.

**Meta-Analysis**

All included articles were examined for primary data which could be included in a meta-analysis of findings. Of the initial 27 articles pulled with some primary data, 15 were secondary data analyses of longitudinal or large education datasets and only five studies included measures of educational outcomes related specifically to a parental engagement intervention. These five interventions were diverse in terms of scope and size of the study but also the intervention type and outcomes measured. Based on the low number of studies with outcomes data and the lack of homogeneity between types of interventions, a meta-analysis was not conducted. It is recommended that future studies on parental engagement interventions should endeavour to include educational outcomes data.

**Other Sources**

Lastly, the review process included limited web-based searches that were typically focused on specific research centres or other sources identified with an investment in education research. These websites included:

- Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People’s Services (C4EO)
- National Literacy Trust
- National Foundation for Educational Research
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation
All searching and assessing exercises yielded 80 sources of evidence to include in the review. These included somewhat diverse types of information, from primary data intervention studies to policy and practices reviews. All sources of evidence were then analysed to draw out emerging themes and key messages, but with the primary focus on strategies, practices, services, and interventions that would be possible for teachers and other school staff to consider, access, and utilise.
3. Themed chunks: what can we do?

3.1. Engaging Vulnerable Families

Children growing up in poorer families tend to emerge from school with substantially lower levels of educational attainment. This is a major contributing factor to patterns of social mobility and poverty. Differential access to material resources, differing attitudes towards schools and education as well as varying levels of educational aspirations within vulnerable families can result in lower educational attainment for vulnerable children. Different social classes, cultures, ethnicities, and family circumstances inform how parents engage with their children’s schooling and the different resources they are able to bring to bear in facilitating their children’s educational trajectories.

What does the evidence say?

School policies and programmes should emphasise parental engagement as an ongoing, continuous state of working (Altschul 2011). Often families who face challenges from low-incomes or marginalisation are time pressed and have multiple sources of worry, so that parents may only assist with learning at home when children struggle academically or socially (Altschul 2011; Blackmore and Hutchinson 2010). Children from poor or challenging backgrounds are less likely to experience a rich home learning environment than children from better-off backgrounds (Goodman and Gregg 2010). Schools need to be aware that material conditions and challenging circumstances affect social relationships and educational processes (Blackmore and Hutchinson 2010).

Perceptions as to the roles and responsibilities of schools and families may depend on the socio-economic position and ethnic background of parents, with differing perspectives as to what the school-family relationship should look like (Blackmore and Hutchinson 2010; Kim 2009). Some parents feel excluded because of the expectations that they be involved both in programmes in which they have no expertise or are geared towards other children (Blackmore and Hutchinson 2010).

Parental aspirations and attitudes to education vary strongly by socio-economic position, with more advantaged parents expecting their children to achieve high educational attainments than the most disadvantaged parents (Brown et al 2009). Expectations and patterns of achievement can also be influenced at the community level, making school-family-community relationships an ideal towards which to work (Brown et al 2009).

Some parents experience barriers to engagement with schools, and these groups of parents are most often those who do not share the social and cultural capital of the school and community (Goodall 2013; Kim 2009). Such barriers, including language, ethnicity, low parental educational attainment, and socioeconomic status, can also work to obscure the parents’ engagement with their children’s learning if it is unfamiliar to the school (Goodall 2013; Kim 2009). Evidence suggests that vulnerable families would benefit from services that build social capital by facilitating access to information about the available options and appropriate support and advice (Grayson 2013). Building parents’ confidence in themselves is integral to children’s learning; a parent’s sense of self-
efficacy and belief in their ability to help their children’s learning is central to whether or not they engage in their children’s schooling (Emerson et al 2012).

What seems to be working?

Specifically focusing on building parents’ expectations of their children and creating positive attitudes towards education and schools can help address transmission mechanisms between socioeconomic and adverse circumstances and low educational attainment (Goodman and Gregg 2010). Informal opportunities for communication and contact between parents and school can help build fruitful relationships, particularly when school leaders are perceived to display openness and an appreciation for different socio-cultural home lives (Riley 2009).

Helping to supply learning resources and support materials can help pupils in vulnerable families to meet academic and life challenges (Griffiths 2012; Altschul 2011; Jewitt and Parashart 2011). By working with the local authority or other community partners to provide resources such as books, computers and internet access, or mathematics games and supplies, schools can make a material impact on closing the attainment gap (Jewitt and Parashart 2011; Goodman and Gregg 2010).

Where possible, the employment of additional staff, such as a youth worker liaison or parental support advisor, to carry out welfare and support work connected to family engagement can make a large difference (Blackmore and Hutchinson 2010). Home-school liaison officers are good for targeted contact with ‘hard to reach’ or ‘under-served’ families, especially when there are limited language or literacy skills in the family (Emerson et al 2012). Sometimes the involvement of community members, such as retired elders, in a volunteering role can also improve the learning capacity of pupils (Blackmore and Hutchinson 2010).

Creating physical spaces in which to conduct interventions, services, or interactions outside of the school may soften any existing negative associations parents may with education and allow a less hierarchical relationship to develop (Blackmore and Hutchinson 2010). However, local context is important. Running a programme out of a school can be a successful engagement option as well, especially when service take-up by referred or targeted families might be made more visible when in a community space (Sylva et al 2008).

Targeting projects at the transition period, both pre-school to primary and primary to secondary, can demonstrate significant benefits for low-income families (Save the Children 2009). Evidence shows a strong relationship between social exclusion and truancy, and between truancy and low academic attainment, so supporting low-income families at critical transition points in their schooling can be a powerful intervention (Goodall 2013; Save the Children 2009).

Activities and events that allow parents to see their children in the school setting can help parents better understand their children’s education (Riley 2009). Strategies such as ‘drop-in’ workshops, ‘stay and play’ sessions, or ‘come and see my best work’ all contribute to building a parent’s positive association with school, both on a personal level and the level of their child’s accomplishments (Riley 2009).

Family learning opportunities, from after-school clubs to parent-child homework sessions, can engage vulnerable families in their children’s education while building both parents’ and pupils’ learning capacities (Riley 2009). Poor literacy is an intergenerational phenomenon (Swain et al
and children of parents who have the poorest grasp of literacy and numeracy are at substantial disadvantage in relation to their own reading and maths development compared to children who have parents with good literacy and numeracy (DCSF 2008). Programmes focusing on family learning should also incorporate a digital technology element, as being able to engage with the digital ‘participatory culture’ is crucial to wider participation in current society – without the skills and attitudes to do so, vulnerable families may find themselves further disadvantaged (Grant 2009).

What is the impact?

A study examining the differential experiences of parents from different social class backgrounds and their use of technology in the home for learning found that parents with no home internet access tended to talk more about the stresses and anxieties of finding convenient and sustainable internet access for their children (Hollingworth et al 2011). In contrast, families with broadband access talked often, extensively, and positively about their child’s learning with technology (Hollingworth et al 2011). A lack of PC and internet access presented particular difficulties for children’s schoolwork, and if their strategies to provide access fail (e.g. not logging enough hours on a school’s online learning platform), the child may be threatened with disciplinary action (Hollingworth et al 2011).

A UK-based intervention study assessing the impact of family literacy programmes looked at both short courses (30-49 hours) and standard (72-96). 56% of parents achieved a qualification on short courses and 71% achieved a qualification on a standard course (Swain et al 2009). Following on from that impact, 65% of all 583 participating parents reported that the family literacy courses led them to be more involved in their child’s pre-school or primary school (Swain et al 2009).

One UK secondary school put concerted effort into engaging its more vulnerable parents through judicious and sensitive use of email, meetings, telephone calls and letters, while also ensuring sympathetic and quick communication with parents was constant (Ofsted 2011). This successful engagement of parents enabled students in difficult circumstances to stay ‘on track’ academically and improved their attendance (Ofsted 2011).

Case Study

An English local authority has pockets of multiple deprivations in each of its towns and significant numbers of people in rural areas living with “medium” deprivation. The local authority perceived a low level of aspiration and engagement with children’s learning among some parents, and in 2009 consulted them about their needs to inform the development of its Parenting and Family Support Strategy. Parents reported difficulty in accessing advice and support services. This problem influenced the development of the Parent Support Workers (PSW) project.

PSWs receive an initial induction programme and ongoing CPD opportunities. Their role involves responding to early indications that children and families could benefit from additional help. The focus is on prevention and early intervention activities, where presenting needs are below the thresholds that trigger the involvement of specialist services and other agencies. Each PSW
provides parenting support courses and classes and one-to-one parenting support for parents across a cluster of primary and/or secondary schools. Where a need for outside help is identified, the PSW provides signposting and access to the relevant specialist services.

73% of referrals to the project come directly from schools, with the main reasons for initial referral being non-attendance at school, child behaviour, and parenting skills.

The project defined its anticipated outcomes:

- improving the engagement of parents and carers with schools
- increasing multi-agency family support work
- supporting learning at home
- improving children’s settling into school routines
- raising expectations

Impact analysis was embedded into the development of the new roles from the outset, with outcomes continuously monitored through reflective working and review of practice and service delivery.

An evaluation conducted with parents and carers in 2010 found that 95% were “very satisfied” with the input received from their PSW, and the remaining 5% were “satisfied”. 96% reported positive change including increased parental confidence, self-esteem and a greater overall understanding of their child; better awareness of available support; and improved child behaviour (Grayson 2013).

Questions and Considerations

Do we show sensitivity to different cultural norms and practices, to lack of material resources, and to possible past negative experiences of school within families?

Is there an assumption that if parents are not visible at school then they must be disengaged?

Do we operate a flexible, open-door environment to encourage all parents’ engagement?

Can we develop and offer a family learning project that helps both parents and pupils to achieve learning outcomes?

Do we have connections with other community and local groups in order to signpost services and support mechanisms for vulnerable families?
3.2. Supporting the Home Learning Environment

Parents play a critical role in promoting academic success through parent-school involvement, stimulation of cognitive growth at home, and promotion of values consistent with academic achievement, and this is another area where the gap between the most and least advantaged may be obvious. Even mealtime conversations about a child’s day at school or a specific activity can have a positive impact on their educational attainment, and regular interactive learning within the home can be both in conjunction with and independent from the formal school system. Children from less advantaged households are less likely to experience a wide range of ‘home learning’ activities than children from more advantaged households (Growing Up in Scotland). Therefore efforts to improve effective communication between all parents and school, creating shared goals and strategies with parents to reinforce children’s out-of-school learning can be ways of addressing the attainment gap.

What does the evidence say?

Parental engagement in their children’s learning in the home has a greater effect on their achievement than parental involvement in school-based activities (Goodall 2013; Altschul 2011). However, maximising children’s learning is best facilitated by parents engaging in learning activities in the home in tandem with similar critical instructions being received at school (Crosnoe 2012). The likelihood of educational attainment is increases when the child perceives continuity of values between school and family (Blanch et al 2013).

School initiated engagement can make up some of the disadvantage faced by children of less engaged parents by facilitating the flow of school-related information (about protocols, practices, norms, expectations) to those parents (Crosnoe 2012). As long as some of the basic information relating to the child’s educational process reaches the parents, the home-school relationship can be improved (Crosnoe 2012). To raise achievement, dialogue between parents and their children is extremely important, and this dialogue is best facilitated when the parent is informed about the curriculum, activities, and expectations in the child’s school (Goodall 2013; Goodall and Vorhaus 2011)

Communication between parents and teachers helps teachers to understand their needs, which can be quite varied (Egbert and Salsbury 2009). Two-directional communication helps to solidify both teachers’ and parents’ understanding of context; this is especially important for teachers and school staff as they need to be sensitive to the various status and family characteristics of their pupils and the pupils’ families (Reschly and Christenson 2012). The more regular and frequent the communication between schools and families, the more likely it is that parents will be viewed not as a threat but as a willing and capable partners (Reglin et al 2012; Save the Children 2009).

Parental engagement with their children is particularly important at times of transition (Goodall 2013; Save the Children 2009). Evidence has shown that concerted efforts for parental engagement during periods of transition, especially the transition from primary to secondary school, prevent any gains in achievement prior to a transition from being lost (Save the Children 2009). With effective partnership working between families and schools, the likelihood of truancy, exclusion, or disengagement is lessened (Save the Children 2009).
Despite adolescents’ growing need for autonomy, parental engagement in secondary school pupils’ learning remains a strong predictor of academic achievement (Grayson 2013; Patrikakou 2008). Parents often feel that they are more welcome to engage in their children’s learning during primary school compared to the complexity and size of secondary school (Goodall 2013; DCSF 2008; Harris and Goodall 2008). Encouraging more parental engagement within home in the form of supporting children’s educational aspirations and goals is important as children mature and become more independent (Goodall 2013; Patall et al 2008). Help with homework is something many parents feel they cannot assist with once pupils progress in school and their studies become more specialised (different content and methods of teaching) (Goodall 2013). Lastly, when secondary schools do not maintain the levels of communication and engagement often found in primary schools, parents reported lower levels of trust (Reschly and Christenson 2012).

Parents become involved in schools in different ways – the degree to which families match the culture of the school can go some way to explaining these differences (Goodall 2013; Kim 2009). The expectations from school, in terms of how parents are expected to engage in learning, tend to embody the skills and resources characteristic of white, middle-class families. Parents from this group often share the social and cultural capital of (or are socially and culturally similar to) the teachers with whom they interact (Goodall 2013; Kim 2009). This also means some of the ways that parents engage with their children’s learning, especially when it may refer to different social and cultural norms, may go unnoticed by the school despite the fact that the engagement is still of value to the child’s attainment (Goodall 2013).

Parental engagement with homework can be both positively and negatively associated with achievement (Altschul 2011; Van Voorhis 2010; Xu et al 2009). The reasons why a parent participates can affect the association, for instance, if it is only to hasten the completion of the task or if it is used as an opportunity to interact and talk with the child (Van Voorhis 2010). One review found that parental support for children’s autonomy in homework was associated with higher scores, however, their direct involvement with assignments that are not meant to be interactive or collaborative – particularly when the child is struggling – is associated with lower scores (DCSF 2008).

What seems to be working?

Building parents’ confidence in supporting children’s learning in the home (Blanch et al 2013; Goodall 2013. For instance, in a Spanish paired reading intervention study, findings suggested that families successfully following the programme’s recommendations largely because of the confidence promoted by the teachers and schools regarding the family’s ability to support and mediate the pupils’ learning (Blanch et al 2013).

Collaborative working between parents and children that is mediated or facilitated by teachers and schools (Crosnoe 2012; Scanlan 2012). Part of the Home-School Knowledge Project in the South-west of England devised a method of parents and pupils collaboratively selecting and talking about artefacts in the home to help inspire and improve pupils’ creative writing skills (Scanlon 2012). This type of partnership working allows parents’ knowledge and experience to become relevant to the educational process, and schools can build on knowledge from the home with the child acting as a key agent of this process (Scanlon 2012). Similarly, homework designed or sourced by teachers
that is interactive and interesting can foster positive communications between home and school (Van Voorhis 2010).

Schools should tailor their school-family practices to the level of school and the pupils’ developmental stages (Reschly and Christenson 2012). Partnerships for younger students may focus on school readiness, mastery of basic skills, and motivation; partnerships for older pupils may want to focus on facilitating transitions, pupils’ growing need for autonomy, and decision-making (Reschly and Christenson 2012).

Using a range of activities and communication styles can support the home learning environment (Ofsted 2011). Input directly from parents should be incorporated into setting pupils’ academic targets, and explaining plainly what each academic and subject level meant in practice to parents helped them to visualise where their support could fit (Ofsted 2011). One primary school had parents come to school for part of an afternoon once a week to learnt the strategies and methods that were being used in school (Ofsted 2011).

For literacy and tutoring interventions, a highly structured format helps family members to feel knowledgeable and able (Blanch et al 2013; Egbert and Salsbury 2009). In a literacy programme in the US focused on involving parents in interactive homework assignments in which they had a small but crucial role. Feedback suggested that parents were eager to participate because they did not have to invent new activities but simply share their lives, interests, and values with their children (Egbert and Salsbury 2009). Another study found that practical, easy-to-implement ideas with printed and emailed instructions were successful for engaging parents in at-home education (Doyle and Zhang 2011).

What is the impact?

One study found that schools with strong family engagement were four times more likely to improve student reading over time, and ten times more likely to improve student learning gains in mathematics (Bryk et al 2010 in Emerson et al 2012). Another Australian study found that children aged 9-13 whose homes offered a more stimulating learning environment (measured at age 8) had a higher intrinsic motivation for academic studies – suggesting the long-reaching effects of effective home learning (Duckworth et al 2009 in Emerson et al 2012).

National Child Development Study data found that parental engagement in children’s education at age 7 could independently predict educational attainment at age 20 (Flouri and Buchanan 2004 in DCSF 2008). A meta-analysis of 51 studies shows that initiatives involving parents and children reading together, interactive homework, and regular parent-teacher communication all have a noteworthy relationship with academic outcomes (Jeynes 2010).

A US-based intervention study examined the effectiveness of a parent support reading (PSR) intervention to increase the reading comprehension scores of seventh grade pupils (Reglin et al 2012). Parents participated in PSR workshops twice a week for weeks or once a week for 24 weeks and were encouraged to help their children with reading homework in the evening. The PSR activities resulted in a statistically significant increase in the intervention group’s end-of-grade reading comprehension scores.
Another intervention study in the US focused on the Teachers Include Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) interactive mathematics programme (Van Voorhis 2010). TIPS homework assignments are interactive and include clear objectives for learning, instructions for completion, and explicitly state that pupils are to involve family members. TIPS is teacher-led and it is incorporated into the overall curriculum, ideally for a minimum of one year (some pupils were enrolled in the programme for two years in this study). According to family and pupil surveys, being in the TIPS group positively predicted pupil and family attitudes about the math homework experience, and pupils in TIPS had significantly higher standardised mathematics achievement scores than control pupils. TIPS students and families also reported higher levels of family engagement in maths homework than did control pupils and families (Van Voorhis 2010).

Case Study

The Oceans Mathematics Project aims to help pupils in disadvantaged areas of England to address underachievement in mathematics by changing attitudes and practices of schools, parents, and children specifically through involving their parents in the children’s maths learning process. Children in Years 1-9 can participate and families are encouraged to have more than one member participate – either both parents, grandparents, or siblings.

Workshops are run from schools with family members to help teach mathematics learning strategies, how children are being taught mathematics today, and to improve family members’ understanding of mathematics. These are led by maths teachers, who also make assignments that require family participation are also given, and maths based games are distributed.

Not every school who has implemented the Oceans Mathematics Project demonstrates statistically significant positive impacts, but two schools who originally implemented the intervention perhaps best demonstrate the impact that is possible. Before the project, both school had minimal to non-existent parental engagement as judged by Ofsted; however, their latest Ofsted reports praised both schools for their parental engagement efforts. In terms of improvements in the standards in mathematics, one school increased its number of KS3 pupils achieving level 5 or above by nearly 20% and moved from being in ‘special measures’ (when Ofsted considers that they fail to supply an acceptable level of education) to now being a Maths and Computing Specialist College (Bernie and Lall 2011).

Questions and Considerations

Do we consult all our pupils, parents, and staff about educational needs, plans, and gaps?

Does our school recognise that parents have different needs and different ways of engaging in their children’s education?

Can we think of new interactive homework assignments that emphasise parent-pupil communication mediated by the school?
How can our staff be encouraged to reach out more to families and feel confident in initiating new forms of engagement?

Are there any ways to increase families’ access to educational materials to be used at home?
Social, Emotional, and Behavioural Support

The important role of social-emotional learning in school success is an expanding body of educational and psychological research. Parental engagement and family-focused competency building are the primary means by which to support children’s social, emotional, and behavioural well-being. Risk factors associated with psychological and emotional problems and conduct disorder behaviours include conflict in the family, family breakdown, poverty and low income, abuse, and caregivers who may be struggling with mental illness or drug or alcohol misuse (Geddes 2008). For these reasons working with parents on these issues is a key dimension of parental engagement to reduce the attainment gap. Understanding how social competencies positively influence academic attainment is the aim for many studies that examine either, in broad terms, ‘family functioning’ or ‘cognitive improvement’. However, recently more intervention studies have found that addressing academic and cognitive development alongside social, emotional, and behavioural support is more effective for improving children’s overall outcomes.

What does the evidence say?
There is evidence that the integration of social and emotional programmes into the broader school curriculum can have a positive effect on academic achievement and wellbeing (Emerson et al 2012; Patrikakou 2008). Social and emotional types of learning can improve pupils’ understanding of academic subject matter, reduce anxiety, and increase their motivation to learn (Patrikakou 2008). Focusing on the social and emotional wellbeing of children early in their development, rather than waiting until some pupils begin to exhibit problems, may help to prevent any potential achievement gap (Scott et al 2009). Using parental engagement in education as a tool to enhance pupil wellbeing rather than solely to promote academic achievement, can also reduce the risk of parents placing excessive pressure on students to excel (Emerson et al 2008).

The relationship between poor reading ability and a range of academic, social, emotional and behavioural problems is complicated and it is difficult to disentangle cause and effect. One study associates poor reading with poor outcomes - academic and social and emotional - for children (Scott et al 2009). Low levels of literacy and high levels of behaviour problems, particularly in older children and those transitioning into adolescence, often co-occur (Sylva et al 2008). The link between poor literacy or cognitive abilities and socio-emotional difficulties was also found in the analysis of the Growing Up in Scotland longitudinal study; children with higher mean scores on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire total difficulties scale were more likely to have lower cognitive development scores indicating both lower problem solving and vocabulary ability (Bradshaw et al 2012).

When children and adolescents participate in an intervention or programme aimed to improve their socio-emotional and academic outcomes, those whose families are actively engaged display much less delinquent behaviour later in life than those children whose families were not involved (Grayson 2013; Patrikakou 2008). When parents became engaged in their children’s learning as
What seems to be working?

Effective school-family partnerships include establishing an inviting and participatory relationship with families of pupils – a positive parental attitude towards school will influence the children’s socio-emotional association with the school (Patrikakou 2008; Sylva et al 2008). One possible way to facilitate this partnership is to deliver a community programme at school, with many families experiencing this as less stigmatising than attending a group of ‘referred’ families (Sylva et al 2008). Similarly, effective partnership between the school and family requires unified messages regarding behaviour – when the home reinforces behaviour expected at school it influences the way children respond to learning and the school environment (Harris and Goodall 2008).

The development of a family resource centre in schools can provide parents with brief in-person consultations, telephone consultations, feedback regarding their children, and access to intervention or educational materials (Stormshak et al 2009). These family resource centres also become a means of signposting and linking intervention services, with an emphasis on mental health services for families. It is especially important in areas of high deprivation and disadvantage to link intervention services in the school and community; this facilitates both uptake by families and promotes self-selection into the most appropriate interventions services (Stormshak et al 2009).

Combining support for children’s behaviour while also delivering literacy interventions (Scott et al 2009; Sylva et al 2008). Maximisation of behaviour and learning interventions requires active family engagement and a teacher component to address the classroom context (Scott et al 2009). An example of such an intervention is Supporting Parents on Kids Education in Schools (SPOKES), which was used in several intervention studies (Scott et al 2009; Sylva et al 2008). SPOKES integrates the Incredible Years parent-training programme for managing children’s behaviour with a literacy programme for the children (which varies).

What is the impact?

An intervention trial carried out in 8 primary schools in London over 28 weeks, all located in areas of high disadvantage, included components that addressed parenting behaviour, child behaviour, and child literacy. Because all intervention children rated above average for anti-social behaviours, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire assessment was completed by both parents and teachers both pre- and post-intervention. Intervention children moved from the 80th percentile to the 61st while control children did not change (Scott et al 2009). The rate of children displaying oppositional defiant behaviours also halved. For literacy, intervention children gained a reading age advantage of 6 months, from below average to the top quarter of the population (using the British Ability Scale) (Scott et al 2009).

A Family Check-Up intervention in the US is 3-4 collaborative decision-making sessions with parents in the family resource centre; the intervention included a comprehensive family assessment, support for family management skills, and interventions targeted at helping parents...
reduce youth high-risk behaviour (Stormshak et al 2009). High-risk youth whose families received the intervention showed a GPA (grade point average) that remained stable during the transition to high school, while high-risk youth in the control group demonstrated a decline in GPA. Similarly, the control group showed a substantial growth in absence rates from middle school to high school, while the absence rate among the intervention group remained static (Stormshak et al 2009).

A UK-based randomised control trial on the SPOKES behaviour and literacy intervention demonstrated both a significant reduction in children’s emotional and conduct problems as well as a gain of 6 months of reading age over 3 school terms (Sylva et al 2008). Additionally, parents in the intervention group reported using more strategies associated with successful literacy learning at home with their children.

An US implementation study of the Family and Schools Together (FAST) programme, in which entire families participate in program activities designed to build parental respect in children, improve intra-family bonds, and enhance the family–school relationship (Ackley and Cullen 2010). This preventative programme for at-risk youth demonstrated statistically significant results for enhanced family relationships and parent-school engagement (Ackley and Cullen 2010), and parents reported significant gains in their school involvement, parent-to-school contact, school-to-parent contact, and total parent engagement (Crozier et al 2010).

Case Study

‘Sparking the Imagination’ was a small scale project aimed at enhancing the educational opportunities of young children from disadvantaged backgrounds in Northern Ireland. One of the primary means of achieving this goal was to enabling children and their parents to thrive in the formal school setting, particularly through building their self-confidence and self-esteem, which for children can help raise educational aspirations through positive attitudes to school.

The project operated in 3 primary schools and brought together parents, children, teachers, and creative experts from the community for workshops. Teachers were encouraged to enhance their professional development and follow up on creative ideas that may not fit the regular curriculum, parents were introduced to innovative approaches to parental engagement, and children’s creativity was fostered. All participants planned the workshops together and worked collaboratively.

The area highlighted by all parties in which significant gains were clearly evident was self-esteem. The raising of self-esteem in the children taking part in the study was remarked upon by teachers, parents and the creative experts alike. Teachers claimed that self-esteem was nourished because the creative tasks allowed expression of skill and knowledge in more diverse ways.

Many of the parents reported positive changes in their children’s attitudes to school and commented on how the children wanted to continue creative activities at home. Some felt that they had benefited from the affirmation that their contribution to their child’s education was of value, and that they were in the privileged position of actually seeing their children work in the school environment.
There also appeared to be a growing confidence in parent–teacher interactions and relationships as parents became more comfortable in their participation in the creative workshops and teachers became less fearful of their ability to organise and manage the active learning environment.

**Questions and Considerations**

Do we strive to work with parents to support our pupil’s social, emotional, and behavioural needs?

Do we assess possible connections between a pupil’s conduct problems and their literacy and cognitive development?

How does our relationship with pupil’s families encourage and facilitate their social and emotional wellbeing?

If your school decides to implement an intervention to improve children’s academic outcomes, perhaps an element that focuses on the family engagement on socio-emotional aspects can be integrated?
3.4. Communication and action to increase engagement

Improving the level and quality of parental engagement is often a priority on the agenda of schools. Despite the benefits and rewards of moving beyond the more formal school-parent relationship that revolves around bi-annual parent-teacher meetings and recruiting parents to help staff at a school event, active parental engagement can be challenging, particularly with the most disengaged parents where the biggest gains may be achieved. Interactions between the school and family are maximised when each views the other as educational partners striving towards the common goal of improving children’s learning and outcomes.

What does the evidence say?

Parental engagement needs to be proactive rather than reactive (Olmstead 2013). Developing multiple ways in which parents can be engaged in their children’s education avoids parents shying away from engagement because they cannot see appropriate and constant entry points for that engagement (McKenna and Millen 2013). Creating both a physical and relational ‘shared knowledge’ space is an essential component of successfully working with parents to assist in children’s educational development (Mousoulides 2013; Campbell 2011).

In order to take advantage of opportunities for home-school-community relationships, the parents’ ideas and opinions about their children must be heard and educators must be receptive to this parental voice and presence (McKenna and Millen 2013). Successful communication with parents must be multidirectional, and their engagement in their children’s education must be understood as fluid and specific to culture and context (McKenna and Millen 2013). Conversely, open, multidirectional communication also allows parents to examine and better understand any preconceived notions they might have regarding teachers and school (McKenna and Millen 2013).

Positive teachers’ beliefs and attitudes are needed to maintain the best possible parental engagement, and to build mutual understandings and collaboration (Mousoulides 2013; Emerson et al 2012). Educators need to be careful that they do not slip into a ‘deficit’ thinking style in which parents are thought of in strict terms specific to the educational system (McKenna and Millen 2013). By encouraging an educational partnership as opposed to a formal or social partnership, the learning process of children is best facilitated (Oostdam and Hooge 2013).

Using technology to increase parental engagement is crucial for the future of children’s learning (Olmstead 2013; ). School’s need to maximise emerging technological tools to promote better communication between teachers and parents, and this can include voice-calling systems, school websites, class-parent portals, emails, and e-newsletters (Olmstead 2013). If schools can use technology to allow parents to view their children’s assignments grades as well as upcoming events or tests, some of the time pressures around when parents and teachers can communicate may be relieved (Olmstead 2013;)

What seems to be working?
Developing shared learning goals for children so that parents and teachers reinforce each other’s efforts (Emerson et al 2012). This is best achieved by plain and direct communication that uses no jargon – or explains it clearly – that is conducted via the parents’ preferred medium (Emerson et al 2012). Many parents express a preference for more feedback from school about children’s performance and their role in improving their child’s learning (Grant 2009).

Schools and parents taking account of each other’s needs. Although parents and schools may have differing expectations and opinions as to what is optimum for their educational partnership, each partner brings competencies and expertise to the relationship (Oostdam and Hooge 2013). An important way to address any perceived or actual power differentials between schools and parents is to include parents’ knowledge and input feed into the decision-making process (Yoder and Lopez 2013).

Allowing pupils to become an active agent in the school-family relationship. By participating in progress discussions and developing their own portfolio of progress and results, in conjunction with teachers, pupils can also be involved in explaining progress to their parents (Oostdam and Hooge 2013). In this way, parents and pupils become more familiar and conversant in the language of education while the teachers become more knowledgeable about the families’ needs and contexts (Emerson et al 2012).

Using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) learning platforms for communication and engagement between schools and families (Selwyn et al 2011). By using digital technology to make the school learning more visible, parents’ understanding of the curriculum, expectations, and pupils’ progress can be built upon (Selwyn et al 2011). Digital tools such as online gradebooks give parents and students 24 hour access and help to avoid any surprises when progress reports are distributed (Zeiger and Tan 2012). However, it will be beneficial to provide parents with information and instructions about how to use the technology via printed materials and/or workshops (Zeiger and Tan 2012).

Participation and persistence in a parental engagement project (Dyson et al 2008). Over time, parents and teachers alike can build confidence and change their attitudes, with parents becoming more comfortable interacting with the school and teachers becoming more comfortable working in engaging ways (e.g. home visits and workshops) (Dyson et al 2008).

Collaboration between families, schools, and communities can more easily identify pupils’ needs and pre-empt problems (Timm 2014; Grayson 2013). Schools can play a key role as the coordinators and deliverers of services to improve educational outcomes and information-sharing between schools can help develop engagement practices (Grayson 2013). One critical factor in this partnership working is to get the local authority involved for support with provision, staff, development, and targeting of families and pupils (Swain et al 2009).

What is the impact?

The ‘Connecting Parents with Learning Project’ strengthens parent-student-school relations by facilitating a flexible programme where children teach their parents. (Townsend 2010). In one primary school it was applied to music and culture. Feedback from the end-of-project surveys
showed that nearly all parents agreed that their relationship with the school and teachers was strengthened through the project, and that their understanding of both children’s learning and teachers’ methods was improved. The teachers unanimously agreed that they felt they could communicate with parents more openly after the project, and teachers and parents alike agreed that the approach should be continued with other subjects (Townsend 2010).

**Giving parents access to information encourages many of them to initiate contact with their child’s school (Zeiger and Tan 2012).** A case study survey of parents of first year high school students found that 58% had initiated contact with a teacher because of a grade posted on the school’s online gradebook system (Zeiger and Tan 2012).

A UK pilot project, the Home Access Programme (HAP), found that new conversations can emerge around shareable digital communication when a computer and internet connectivity is provided to families. Participating teachers and ICT coordinators all agreed that HAP had improved parental engagement with students’ learning and the school (Jewitt and Parashart 2011). Some 85% of 183 surveyed parents agreed that HAP had made them feel more involved with their child’s learning (Jewitt and Parashart 2011).

**Case Study**

In August 2012, eight schools in Scotland participated in the iPad Scotland pilot project in which the schools adopted mobile technology in one of three ways: with the digital tablets being retained in the school and issued to students for particular lessons; with the tablets allocated to each student for use across the lessons but to be kept at the school; and with the tablets being given to students to ‘own’ individually for use at school and at home.

The tablet devices were found to facilitate the achievement of many of the core elements required within the Curriculum for Excellence framework, and the significant transformation in access to and use of technology by pupils affected various educational factors such as motivation, self-efficacy, and increased school engagement. A major finding was that parents also appeared to become more engaged with the school and their child’s learning when the iPad was taken home.

The majority of parents reported that their children gained significant positive dispositions towards learning as a result of access to the iPad – over 80% considered the pilot project to have been valuable for their child and say it significantly changed their child’s enjoyment of and attitude towards school. 75% of parents felt that their children were now more willing to complete homework, and over 90% of students believed that the iPad helped them to learn more and learn more difficult concepts better.

Perhaps more importantly, many parents reported noticing that their children were more willing to talk to them about the school work when they brought the iPad home. The ‘full ownership’ model of the project, where pupils could take the tablet home, became the recommended model based on the conclusions of strengthening parental engagement (Burden et al 2012).

**Questions and Considerations**
Has our school developed a parental engagement strategy that considers the needs of different parents and made it a priority of our school agenda?

Do we provide ways for parents to be included in the decision-making process regarding their children’s learning and progress?

In our school, is it clear to parents how they can approach the school? Can they telephone/e-mail/interact physically and digitally?

Do we do our best to accommodate parents’ schedules and communication preferences in order to ensure they feel welcomed and valued?

Can we develop/improve our school’s use of Information and Communication Technologies in order to maximise parents’ engagement?
3.5. Engaging with Fathers and non-resident parents

The more recent surge in interest in father involvement in children’s outcomes clearly extends to fathers’ engagement in children’s learning. However, there continues to be a relative scarcity of father-specific evaluations, reviews, and services, as most of the programmes and literature specifies ‘parents’. Within the evidence, the term ‘father’ is almost always used to include biological fathers, father-figures, step-fathers, or a significant male carer or role model. It is difficult to isolate the effect of father engagement from other types of parental engagement, and the evidence suggests that engagement of a parent/carer is more significant that gender or family structure. Therefore engagement of fathers may be critical in the absence of any other parent/carer in the family.

What does the evidence tell us?

The presence and engagement of fathers is positively associated with children’s intellectual development, social competence, and emotional well-being (Clark 2009; Geddes 2008). A lack of recognition of their significance and of effort to include them in their children’s education, both at school and at home, can have negative implications for children’s learning, mental, and emotional well-being (Clark 2009; Tan and Goldberg 2009; Geddes 2008). However, there is little equivalent evidence for the involvement of mothers and it is hard to isolate the impact of fathers’ involvement from parental involvement more generally.

Fathers reported the following as barriers to involvement in parenting support services and parental/family engagement in learning programmes: work commitments; a lack of awareness of services offered; a lack of organisational support; and concerns over the content of the services (Passey 2012; Goodall and Vorhausl 2011; Bayley et al 2009). Fathers are less likely to get involved with their children’s education than mothers, with one Ipsos MORI family learning survey revealing 68% of mothers read with children compared to 54% of fathers (Grant 2009).

When looking at the influence of father involvement on child outcomes it is often difficult to disentangle father involvement from the effects of social class and family structure, as well as access to resources and the general socio-economic context that shape children’s well-being (Clark 2009). For instance, the findings from an England-based study of the REAL (Raising Early Achievement in Literacy) family literacy project suggest that fathers who were indicated as having little or no involvement with their children’s literacy were more likely to be on a low income than fathers who were reported to engage in literacy activities with their children (Morgan et al 2009).

Fathers’ engagement in children’s learning may be less visible than mothers’ (Morgan et al 2009). Morgan et al found that while fathers were reportedly highly involved with recognising children’s literacy achievements and engaging in informal reading and writing activities with them at home, they were much less likely to be the providers of literacy opportunities (providing supplies, access, and space to engage in literacy) (2009).

Fathers need to be involved in their children’s learning and development from the beginning (Potter et al 2012). Fathers’ involvement in the early years correlates with the later academic achievement of their children. Fathers’ involvement in their children’s early schooling, particularly their more direct and interpersonal involvement, was shown to increase children’s enjoyment of school and reduce their school-related anxiety (McBride et al 2009; Tan and Goldberg 2009).
The motivation for fathers’ later school involvement affects whether or not the engagement impacts on children’s achievement positively or negatively (McBride 2009; Tan and Goldberg 2009). When fathers play an ‘additive’ role in their children’s later education – becoming involved because their children are perceived to be struggling academically by either the school or family – children’s performance and attainment could actually suffer.

What seems to be working?

Best practice for recruiting and engaging fathers includes:

- **Active targeted promotion and prioritising fathers within organisations and school** – For example, the Father’s Transition Project in England demonstrated that a gender-differentiated approach, which did not exclude mothers’ participation but did focus on involving fathers, was effective in appealing to and engaging fathers in the pilot project (Potter et al 2012; Bayley et al 2009).

- **Alternative forms of provision** – The use of more ‘hands-on’ activities and scheduling interventions for evenings and weekends both worked to engage more fathers (O’Mara et al 201; Passey 2012).

- **Inclusion of varied ethnic or cultural perspectives** – In the Father’s Transition Project, the project attributed the success of engagement in large part to using a worker who came from a similar background to the participants (Potter et al 2012; Goodall and Vorhaus et al 2011).

Engagement programmes aimed at fathers should provide opportunities for them to become more involved in and responsible for children’s learning in the home and wider world (Lipscomb 2011; Geddes 2008). Results from an exploratory study suggest that fathers’ early parenting may have a direct impact on their later involvement in school, but it is never too late to strive for increasing fathers’ confidence in their parenting competency as well as in their learning support (Passey 2012; McBride et al 2009).

**Fathers often engage with their children’s literacy by using alternative literary forms and practices** (Passey 2012; Morgan et al 2009). By expanding and encouraging literacy forms beyond the traditional book based modes to include magazines, newspapers, television guides, and even maps, the lived experiences and knowledge of fathers from lower socio-economic means may be built upon within literacy programmes (Passey 2012; Morgan et al 2009; Fathers should be specifically targeted in communications from the school regarding parents’ events and meetings (Goodall and Vorhaus et al 2011; Lipscomb 2011). When communication from schools address ‘parents’, evidence suggests that fathers are unlikely to assume it means them, so that direct notification increases the likelihood of their attendance (Lipscomb 2011).

**Services and programmes for engaging the family in children’s learning should specifically target fathers in recruitment and communication** (Passey 2012; Goodall and Vorhaus et al 2011; Bayley 2009; Grant 2009). With many fathers perceiving parent services, support, and programmes to be aimed at mothers, recruitment is more successful through various channels (post, email, text, telephone, and the internet) and in non-traditional venues, such as pubs, sports facilities, workplaces, and job centres (Bayley 2009).
**Case Study**

Research that examined what happened when a group of fathers were recruited to access the Wider Family Learning Project in a town in England focused on exploring the factors that are influential in enabling and motivating more fathers to participate in their children’s learning (Passey 2012). Through questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and observations, the findings from this project tell us:

- Past poor learning experiences discouraged fathers’ commitment → when programmes aid fathers in developing coping strategies and increase their awareness of children’s capacities, the impact of past negative learning experiences is reduced
- The discounting of fathers’ own sociocultural experiences and knowledge can lead to disengagement → by valuing the skills related to individual fathers’ interests and accepting and integrating their prior knowledge and experiences, a programme curriculum can build on fathers’ transferable skills and provide a solid foundation
- Curriculums need to build on lived experiences of families and not be externally dictated → when fathers and professionals share and recognise skills equally, a positive environment is quickly established
- Paternal motivations for involvement flourish when they are left in sole charge → plenty of opportunities for further bonding with their children can increase fathers’ self-efficacy
- A curriculum built around hierarchical relationships will lead to poor working relationships → clear curriculum structure, good planning, and the familiarity and convenience of project setting instils confidence and encourages attendance

**What is the impact?**

There is consistent evidence that fathers’ interest and engagement with their children’s learning is statistically associated with better educational outcomes, including better exam results, higher levels of educational qualifications, higher educational expectations, more positive attitudes and better behaviours (Goldman 2005 cited in DCSF 2008). Furthermore, these positive associations exist across different family types, including two-parent families, single-parent families, and children with non-resident fathers (Goldman 2005 in DCSF 2008).

**Family literacy programmes need to acknowledge that they are building on families’ existing knowledge, skills, and culture** (Morgan et al 2009). When taking into consideration fathers’ alternative forms of literacy practices, the mixed methods REAL study found that almost two-thirds (65%) of fathers reportedly read to their children, almost half (45%) helped children with writing, and almost two-thirds (63%) modelled reading behaviour at home (Morgan et al 2009).

**Questions and considerations**

Do we specifically target our information about school expectations, activities, and event invitations to the children’s fathers, especially when we are aware of their role in the child’s family (i.e. as lone parent or primary caregiver)?
Do we begin any specific targeting for paternal engagement from day one of (primary, secondary) school or do we wait until there appears to be a problem or struggle with the student’s achievements?

Do we gather and listen to fathers’ experiences, views, and knowledge in order to integrate them with our educational services and programmes?

Are fathers’ contributions to their children’s learning fully understood, including alternative forms of involvement that are not traditional or typically associated with mothers’ activities?
The well-being of children in care can present particular difficulties, as a significant number of children come from deprived and disadvantaged backgrounds compounded by neglect, maltreatment and domestic violence. Children who are in public care in the UK typically achieve lower educational standards than their peers who are not in public care (Fernandez 2008). Children’s psychological needs are particularly relevant to the educational context, as they impact on educational achievement and engagement with schooling. Among the factors related to looked-after children’s lower educational achievement are low educational attainment, poor attendance, overrepresentation in school exclusion, suspension, frequent school changes as a consequence of placement breakdown, low completion rates and high unemployment among those who age out of the system.

What does the evidence tell us?

Research suggests that one of the factors needed in order for a child in care to succeed academically is a supportive home environment that encourages studying (Osborne et al 2010). This can be made difficult by limited contact between the key adults involved in supporting education of looked after children (e.g. carers, teachers, and social workers). Therefore, all carers should be encouraged to take a direct role in supporting their child’s education (Osborne 2010). Teachers and carers need to focus on looked after children within a framework of high expectations and good teaching and learning for all students (Ofsted 2008). Support for looked after children should be rooted in good practice for all children (Ofsted 2008). One strand of a longitudinal study in Australia found that looked after children want an adult to take interest and encourage them to do well in their school work (Fernandez 2008). Finally, a review of 11 interventions aimed at improving the educational attainment of looked after children concluded that if provided with adequate support, they seem to be able to improve in school (Forsman and Vinnerljung 2012).

A strong home-school partnership is critical to narrowing the attainment gap for looked after children, and this partnership must often include the state as parent too (Wigley 2011; Fernandez 2008). Because looked after children’s lives often lack stability, carers, educators, and any agency workers must all work together strategically to support their learning (Zetlin et al 2010). Additionally, when a pupil’s experience of learning is positive, the school environment and the educational process can offer structure, boundaries and security to looked after children (Wigley 2011; Zetlin et al 2010).

The development of structures and organisation that will help to identify any problems hindering school success for looked after children at early stages is needed (Zetlin 2010). The use of some form of data-tracking system between carers, educators, and agencies can facilitate strategic communication.

Caregivers often seek outside help to address the children’s learning, social, emotional, and behavioural needs (Zetlin et al 2010). Looked after children may need more intensive support, and
inter-related service delivery, co-ordinated strategy, and integrated responses to looked after children’s psychological and educational needs should be implemented and practiced (Fernandez 2008).

**What seems to be working?**

The recognition that caregivers are an important source for improving educational outcomes for looked after children (Cheung et al 2012; Flynn et al 2012). Caregiver engagement, particularly in the home setting, predicted greater probabilities of academic success for youth in care (Cheung et al 2012). Higher educational aspirations on the part of the caregivers were associated with better outcomes, and caregiver involvement in a greater number of school activities predicted significant improvement in the youth’s average marks (Flynn et al 2012).

Continuous and regular communications and multiple opportunities for self-evaluation and sharing of ideas (Ofsted 2008). Looked after children’s carers value being involved in the pupil’s learning plan, receiving written communications regularly, and advice about to support learning in the care facility or home (Ofsted 2008).

Close monitoring and communication of academic, social and emotional progress from an early stage (Ofsted 2008). Parents and carers appreciated being involved in the pupil’s learning and development, and a sense of trust was instilled when schools took time to discuss issues when they arose instead of waiting until the possibility of harsher disciplinary measures were needed (Ofsted 2008).

Delivering support and services for looked after children in a low profile manner (Ofsted 2008). Schools need to employ flexibility and make some allowances for the effects of a history of traumatic events without making looked after children feel marginalised (Wigley 2011).

Projects which provide materials to support and develop learning demonstrate improvement in looked after children’s attitudes towards learning as well as their actual attainment (Griffiths 2012). The Letterbox Club project in England sent parcels of literacy materials directly to the where looked after children were staying, not only to encourage learning with their carers but to also focus their energy on engaging with and owning educational materials (Dymoke and Griffiths 2010).

**What is the impact?**

The Letterbox Club, which sends literacy materials (e.g. books, stationary, and maths games) to looked-after children every 6 weeks with the aim of engaging carers, demonstrated a significant improvement in reading and maths ability (Osborne 2010; Griffiths et al 2010). For example, at the end of the programme, the maths test results were converted into National Curriculum levels for each child; for two years running, the percentage of intervention pupils increasing their National Curriculum level score by at least one level equalled or surpassed the average rate of their non-looked after peers (Griffiths et al 2010).

An English paired reading literacy programme for looked-after children and their foster carers that required weekly liaising between teachers and foster carers demonstrated an average improvement of each child making a year’s progress in just over four months (Osborne 2010).
Additionally, the average amount of progress made for each month the child participated in the intervention resulted in a reading age increase by just shy of three months (Osborne 2010).

**Literacy interventions’ impact may extend beyond literacy skills alone** – there were reported increases in the children’s confidence and interest in reading (Osborne 2010; Griffiths 2012). Not only do children get to spend one-on-one time with their carer, but reportedly the interventions also facilitated partnership working, building the trust and confidence in the relationship between carers, teachers, and social workers (Osborne 2010; Dymoke and Griffiths 2010).

**Case Study**

An English literacy intervention aimed at improving foster children’s education and their carers’ engagement in their learning used a paired reading approach. Training workshops for foster carers, school staff and social workers were undertaken to address the use and delivery of paired reading. Over a 16 week period, 35 carers and children read together several times a week, the average being 3 times. Schools liaised with carers on a weekly basis to discuss progress and issues.

At each weekly meeting between the school staff and carers, monitoring forms were completed. For each pupil schools collected a baseline measures of reading age using the Salford test, and again immediately after the completion of the intervention.

The results of the paired reading study were encouraging and demonstrated a marked increase in the reading age of the looked after children who participated. On average, reading age improved by 3 months during each month in the project – meaning that over the 4 months of the intervention, each child made an average of one year’s progress.

Findings also suggested positive impact beyond literacy skills. Feedback from carers suggested that for many of the looked after children, their confidence and enthusiasm for reading increased, as well as an improvement in the relationship between carer and child (Osborne et al 2010).

**Questions and Considerations**

Do we provide extra support and services for looked after children’s educational and psychological wellbeing?

Is our communication with carers and agency workers regular and do we all exchange relevant information about the progress and possible problems of our looked after children?

Do we deliver any support or services in a ‘low profile’ manner in order to not make looked after children feel marginalised or stigmatised in comparison to other children?

Do we encourage looked after children, their carers, and our staff to possess high educational expectations and aspirations for their achievement and attainment?

Do we provide advice and support to carers on strategies and methods to best engage in learning in the home setting?
Resources
The following resources have been developed to support the implementation of findings from this review:

A: Self Evaluation on parental engagement
B: Parental Needs Assessment Guide
C: Using Community Assets Guide
Evaluating your parental engagement strategy

A robust evaluation will let you know whether your strategy is making a difference. Evaluation is an ongoing process, allowing you to assess as you go whether the strategy is being effective and whether it needs to be refined.

From the beginning, be clear about what impact you want to achieve.

Children and young people who have at least one parent or carer engaged in their schooling do better at school in many areas including: assessment scores; attendance; behaviour; transitions; and post-16 destinations.

The outcome you are seeking is that children will do better educationally, with the gap between the highest and lowest achieving being reduced. Your overall aim, therefore, may be to:

‘Increase family engagement with the school and their children’s learning in order to help close the attainment gap’.

The overall objectives for your strategy may sit in the following six dimensions of parental engagement.

**Parenting**: Increase opportunities for parents to get support with parenting and understand their child’s education and developmental needs

**Communication**: Communicate and listen effectively to all parents about their role in their child’s education

**Volunteering**: Increase opportunities and encouragement for all parents to come into school at different times.

**Learning at home**: Improve information and advice on the content of the curriculum and how parents can help their children.

**Decision-Making**: Increase the number and variety of parents involved in parent organisations and committees

**Collaboration with the community**: Strengthen links with businesses and agencies in the community

What are you going to do to achieve your aim and objectives?

There are many activities that make it easier for families to be more involved and help them develop a more positive relationship with the school. The activities that you organise will depend on what your objectives are. Some sample activities are below:
• An ‘open door’ policy that makes clear parents are welcome to contact the school, or drop in, at any time to discuss any issues they have relating to their child or child’s education.

• Hold information events about how parental engagement with a child’s learning can improve their educational outcomes.

• Hold family learning events in the school to help build parental capacity e.g. ‘how to help your child with maths’.

• Hold information events in association with local community services (i.e. library service, local college that holds evening classes, other community education groups)

• Find out parents’ preferred means of communication, and, using this, send explanatory notes home to accompany homework.

**Decide what data you need to collect to measure how effective your strategy is**

It is important to continuously record and measure the impact of your activities. You will need to record quantitative information, but qualitative information can also provide valuable insight into the impact that your strategy is having.

**Quantitative information**

You might collect the following data in relation to any family events you organise:

• Numbers of parents attending
• Percentage of school roll whose parents attended
• Number of parents attending who had not previously attended a school event
• Number of parents attending whose children are in the bottom attainment quintile
• A follow-up survey of parents who attended to find out how useful they found the event and whether it has had a positive impact on their understanding of the subject area i.e. the importance of getting involved with their child’s education.
• Impact on children’s performance – attainment, behaviour, attendance, punctuality

You might collect the following data in relation to a new ‘Open door’ policy that you have introduced:

• How many parents know about the policy
• Whether the policy is making a difference to parent contact (all parents)
• Whether the policy is making a difference to parent contact (parents whose children are doing less well educationally)

**Qualitative information**
Your sense of whether your strategy is working and family engagement is improving will also come from subtle changes that are less easy measure. For example, subtle changes in how parents interact with the school, anecdotal conversations that you have with parents, or a survey or focus group in which you ask parents to describe how they feel about something.

**Decide whether your strategy has been successful.**

**Decide whether to continue your strategy and whether it needs to be improved**
Closing the attainment gap

ASSESSING PARENTAL NEED

We know that children and young people who have at least one parent or carer engaged in their schooling do better at school. You will get to know most parents by creating an inclusive, vibrant and connected school community – developing a two-way relationship with a strong parental engagement strategy.

Who are you assessing?

Some parents find it more difficult to engage with their child’s school and their child’s education. You may need to target particular groups of parents or individual parents in order to understand what their specific needs are.

What are you assessing?

Confidence
How confident are parents in their ability to support their child educationally? Are they comfortable in the school setting and in dealing with teachers and other professionals?

Capacity
What capacity do parents have to support their child’s education and optimise outcome? Are there any issues with literacy and numeracy? Do they have needs in terms of personal and emotional support, resilience, motivation and commitment?

Accessibility
What are the barriers that prevent parents from engaging with the school and their child’s education? For example, parents whose first language is not English or where engagement with schools may not be a cultural norm; parents who have disabilities, or illnesses that affect their capacity to be involved; logistical issues in terms of transport, distance or caring responsibilities; or limited access to resources which support learning such as books, computers and knowledge of how to use them effectively.

What parents already do
What do parents currently do – in terms of type of activity and quality? For example, parents may read to a child but for how long? how frequently? what type of material? do they discuss what they are reading? and do they use it to spark off dialogue about other things?

How you assess

Your aim is to give parents an opportunity to describe their needs as a family in relation to the above. There are a number of approaches your school can use. In many cases it will be a combination of the following:

Survey
Surveys are an effective way of finding out what parents think in a structured way that enables you to analyse the results. Take into account any accessibility issues and ensure each question uses clear, concise language, avoids jargon and relates directly to the purpose of your survey.

Focus group
Focus groups involve small groups of parents (no more than 6-8 people). A facilitator encourages open discussion, which can give a deeper insight into parents’ views than a survey.

Face-to-face meetings
Some parents may feel uncomfortable in school so using a neutral venue such as a café or community centre can help. Relationships between schools and parents can be greatly enhanced by contact outside the school. Home visits may also be considered.

Informal
Simply talking to parents can help build relationships that may lead to more formal methods of engagement. For example, a school ran a breakfast club for families experiencing difficulties. The families were comfortable in this setting and the headteacher used this as an opportunity to open up a dialogue with them.

Enlisting the support of partner agencies
Other agencies can provide helpful information to help inform engagement approaches.

Document parent contact so that all relevant school staff have an understanding of how best to support the family. This will be of value when a child moves from one teacher to another.

Interpret parents’ feedback and plan future action
Closing the attainment gap

USING COMMUNITY ASSETS

Community assets are:
resources, strengths, capacities and knowledge outwith the school that can support and enhance children’s school experience and their educational outcomes.

**LOCAL PEOPLE:**
use the knowledge, skills, creativity and enthusiasm of the people around you

**LOCAL SERVICES:**
be part of a network of local services to support better educational outcomes

**LOCAL ENVIRONMENT:**
benefit from the buildings, parks and open spaces on your doorstep

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**Local people**

Parents
Parents have knowledge of their own child that will complement teachers’ skills and expertise. If parents feel more involved in their child’s education, this will help their child achieve more and do better at school. The Parents as partners in their children’s learning toolkit includes examples of how to encourage parents to get more involved.

Don’t forget dads
Fathers are less likely to have contact with school than mothers, particularly in early years and primary education. They represent a substantial untapped resource. Make specific efforts to welcome and include dads. There are many examples of good practice having ‘dads’ days at school; inviting them to undertake voluntary activity such as paired reading and helping with outings ensuring that non-resident dads are treated equally in communication and involvement opportunities.

The wider family
Older siblings, grandparents and other relatives can also contribute positively to child’s educational outcomes.

Others in the community
In every community there are people who have the time, skills and knowledge to support their local school. They can also be instrumental in reaching out to families who have not voluntarily engaged with the school. Encourage their voluntary involvement through active recruitment and develop clear plans for their deployment and support.

**Local services**

In almost every community there exists a range of services than can support better educational outcomes. Get to know what services exist in your local area and understand how these services might contribute to families being better engaged and to achieving better learning outcomes.

Other schools
Other schools and teachers can be a great source of information as to what has and hasn’t worked.

Other agencies
*Other agencies* includes police, social work, housing, transport, early years provision, voluntary agencies, and health services. If a family has involvement from a social worker, health visitor, or voluntary agency, these workers can provide helpful information to help inform engagement approaches: They may also be able to support parents directly in becoming more actively involved with the learning process. Community Learning and Development staff have specialised knowledge of family learning methods and can give expert advice on what works best.

Community groups and businesses
Local clubs and groups such as sports clubs and hobby groups can offer learning experiences for children and parents both within and outwith school. Businesses can offer financial support, but can also provide equipment and expertise as well as work experience opportunities.

**Local environment**

Use your local space to help learning. Buildings, parks and other open spaces can offer a wealth of learning opportunities. They can also be used as venues for family contact. Some parents may find schools unwelcoming or intimidating so using a neutral venue such as a café for meeting or community centre for parent events may make it easier for them to engage with school staff. Relationships between schools and parents can be greatly enhanced by contact outwith the school.
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The National Deaf Children’s Society (NDCS) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this call for written evidence by the Committee on the issue of how parents, guardians and schools can best work together to improve attainment and achievement for all school pupils, particularly those whose attainment is lowest.

1. Background

1.1. The National Deaf Children’s Society (NDCS) is the leading charity in Scotland dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people. In Scotland, we have a dedicated team based in Glasgow led by Heather Gray. The team has a strong focus on addressing the attainment gap that exists for deaf learners. This includes the work we do with our Young Campaigners who are a group of deaf young people aged 14-20 years old. They call for better services and campaign on issues affecting deaf children in Scotland.

1.2. Please refer to our submission dated 27 February for further background information about NDCS.

2. Context

2.1. Scottish Government data shows that there is a significant attainment gap for hearing impaired school leavers, and the attainment of this group is among the lowest of all pupils in Scotland.

2.2. In the 2012/14 year, the average tariff score of deaf school leavers was 289, while the average score for leavers with no additional support needs was 439. In the same year, almost 10% of deaf school leavers left with no school qualifications.

2.3. Deaf school leavers face a significant attainment gap in their post school destinations and employability. According to Scottish Government data, 19% of deaf school leavers found employment upon leaving school last year compared with 25.5% of those leavers with no additional support needs. UK wide employment figures also suggest that only 58% of deaf adults are employed compared with 80% of the hearing adult population.

2.4. NDCS believes that families, and the role of parents and guardians, is the most important influence on deaf children and young people and need clear, balanced information so they can make informed decisions. The role of education and
other services, not just schools, is critical in supporting parents to establish nurturing and inclusive home environments for deaf children in the early years and beyond.

3. whether schools always explain clearly to parents how children learn throughout their school years and how parents could help their development (e.g. with reading and wider literacy approaches);

3.1. Parents and guardians of children with additional support needs, such as those who are deaf, need particular support and knowledge in order to understand how they can help their child’s learning and development. Around 90% of parents of deaf children are hearing, meaning that since their child’s birth they experience barriers in fostering the rich linguistic and communicative environments required to ensure the positive development of their child in the early years.

3.2. As such, parents and guardians of deaf children may require additional support and information to ensure they fully understand the unique ways in which their children learn. Much of the information required by parents of deaf children is specialist in nature, covering issues such as acoustics, hearing technology or how to help deaf children develop new vocabulary given that they often lack the benefit of incidental learning – the unintended learning that happens as a result of hearing the world around them. This specialist information may also cover issues such as working memory, a critical skill children need to develop numeracy skills but one deaf children experience more barriers in developing. These are just a few examples of how the ways in which deaf children learn are different to hearing children and why specialist information and support is required.

3.3. While 80% of deaf children are educated within mainstream schools, deafness is a low incidence need and mainstream teachers are unlikely to gain the experience and develop the knowledge and skills to ensure deaf children can access the curriculum effectively. At the recent Deaf Learners Conference held in partnership by NDCS and Education Scotland, young people identified deaf awareness at their school as one of their top challenges affecting their school experiences. Practitioners within mainstream schools may not hold specialist knowledge in deafness and therefore may not be best placed to support parents in developing their child’s learning with regards to literacy and numeracy. Deaf learners and their parents and guardians often rely on peripatetic Teachers of the Deaf for support.

3.4. Teachers of the Deaf are more likely to be appropriately skilled to support parents. The Scottish Government have recognised the need for teachers working wholly or mainly with deaf children to obtain a mandatory post-graduate qualification in deaf education. Under this legislation, local authorities must ensure that teachers:

(a) acquire knowledge, understanding and skills of a generic or core nature which will provide a sound foundation for teachers to work with children and young persons with additional support needs;
(b) acquire additional specialised knowledge, understanding and skills to enable them to operate as effective teachers of pupils who have hearing impairment, or visual impairment, or both hearing and visual impairment.

3.5. The Scottish Government has also set out the competencies which Teachers of the Deaf should acquire. These include among others:

- a critical knowledge of different types of linguistic and developmental assessments relevant to hearing impaired pupils, and an ability to carry out a range of assessments, and to interpret and use assessment results effectively, applying them to the curriculum and to skills of daily living.
- an ability to interpret and evaluate audiological assessments, and provide professional advice and comment to parents, other professionals, and to the pupils concerned, on the implications of these assessments for pupil audition with amplification;
- an understanding of the linguistic potential of hearing impaired pupils, of barriers to language and literacy acquisition which they may face, and an understanding of the approaches to and processes of language and literacy development;
- an understanding of cognitive/intellectual potential and diversity, both verbal and non-verbal, among hearing impaired pupils, and implications for learning;

3.6. Teachers of the Deaf who are skilled in this way can provide vital support to parents and guardians and their deaf children. However, NDCS is concerned that there are inconsistencies in the delivery of peripatetic services. Investment in these services varies across Scotland, with a third of Teachers of the Deaf not holding the mandatory qualification. Many peripatetic services are being increasingly affected by moves towards an inclusion agenda and subsequent reduction in specialist services, proposed service redesign, staff restructure or proposed budget reduction. In addition, there has been almost the complete withdrawal of Educational Audiology across Scotland and the specialist workforce faces the ongoing problem of its ageing workforce, with over 50% of Teachers of the Deaf due to retire within the next 10 to 15 years.

3.7. These peripatetic services are critical to supporting and informing parents and guardians in order that they can better support the learning and development of their deaf children. NDCS recommends that there continues to be investment into these services and that Education Scotland carries out an Aspect Review into education provision for deaf learners to ensure service provision is fit for purpose and to set out recommendations to improve outcomes for deaf learners. This Review could also explore the unique challenges parents of deaf children face in helping raise their children’s attainment, setting out recommendations for improvement.

3.8. The role of the third sector in equipping parents and guardians to support the learning and development of their deaf child is also substantial. NDCS produces a range of resources and publications for parents and guardians with information and advice on how to support their child’s development. These include resources for supporting the development in literacy and numeracy from the early years

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3.10. The NDCS also publishes a number of resources around communication, technology, parenting, education and financial support. There is scope to improve how schools and organisations like Education Scotland support parents to access this kind of valuable information by disseminating resources and signposting to third sector organisations.

3.9. The NDCS family support and advice services offer parents and guardians an opportunity to obtain impartial information and advice on how to support their deaf children. NDCS also offers a range of events and courses for parents which aim to empower and inform. These include Family Sign Language courses, Parenting a Deaf Child courses, Newly Identified Weekend events, as well as Pre-school Weekend events and other information days and workshops. These events are often the only information sessions available for parents and guardians of deaf children in their local area and play a critical role in informing parents, and raising their confidence in supporting their children.

3.10. The role of multi-agency working is critical too to support parents and guardians to help raise the attainment of their deaf children. Strong messages are required from professionals across agencies that work with deaf children to highlight factors that influence learning to parents and guardians. Audiologists, Speech and Language Therapists, Educational Psychologists, social workers and others all have a role to play in supporting parents. For example, research has found that if a child only wears their hearing aids for 4 hours a day, it would take that child 6 years to acquire the language that a hearing child would develop in one year. There is a significant role for professionals across health, social care, education and the third sector to relay these critical messages to parents to ensure they are supporting the learning and development of their deaf child in the best possible way.

4. whether schools are always flexible enough to allow parents to be involved in their child’s education (given parents’ work commitments, for example);

no comments

5. the extent to which schools offer particular support to the parents of pupils from the most disadvantaged communities, in order to improve the attainment of those pupils;

5.1. Disadvantaged is not defined here, but considering the attainment of deaf children is among the lowest of all pupils in Scotland – they are a disadvantaged group. Similarly, given that 90% of parents and guardians of deaf children are hearing and therefore experience challenges in communicating with their child, they are also a disadvantaged group. As discussed above, there is little provision for parents and guardians of deaf children directly from schools. Many parents of deaf children, and those parents with other additional support needs, tell NDCS that they often feel isolated and uninformed. Their child could be the only deaf child in the school and they often feel a lack of opportunity to meet other parents in similar situations, and do not receive information or signposting to support. There is scope to improve how schools are communicating with parents in this respect, and connecting parents in similar situations together through parent forums.
5.2. Parents and guardians of deaf children are not a homogenous group, and within this population there are particular groups of parents that experience additional barriers. For example, recent research from the University of Edinburgh on the post-school destinations of deaf and hard of hearing school leavers found that those from socio-economic deprived backgrounds experienced a double disadvantage as they often experienced a lack of parental support, guidance and advocacy\(^2\). There is a need to ensure that those parents from lower socio economic backgrounds feel informed and empowered to support their deaf children. The research clearly showed that where parental advocacy was effective, deaf young people saw better outcomes including having appropriate support in place, higher academic attainment and more positive and sustained post school destinations being achieved.

5.3. In addition, those parents and guardians from black and minority ethnic backgrounds may experience additional cultural and linguistic barriers. Having English as an additional language, or in some cases the cultural perceptions and stigma attached to deafness may impact on how a parent is able to support their deaf child. There is a need for schools to identify those parents experiencing these additional barriers and understand how to signpost and engage with these groups. NDCS for example delivers a BME Volunteer Network through which we support parents and guardians of deaf children who do not have English as their first language. Our volunteers can support families by providing translation and one to one support in 12 community languages including Urdu, Arabic and Polish. NDCS also supports the Scottish Minority Deaf Children’s Society which is a national group for families with deaf children with English as an additional language, through this group families can access information, events and contact other parents in similar situations. Improving how schools signpost parents to organisations like NDCS can facilitate more parents to feel equipped to support their children.

5.4. Another group of parents and guardians who experience additional barriers are those who are deaf themselves. These individuals may require communication support to engage with schools which can be time-consuming and expensive to arrange. For those with British Sign Language as their first language, understanding written communications from the school in English may also be challenging and important information may not be fully conveyed to parents if this is not addressed. Schools should be aware of this group of parents and make appropriate provision to meet their needs to ensure they have all the information they need to best support their deaf child.

6. whether there is evidence to demonstrate which approaches used by schools have been most successful and whether these are being used, as appropriate, throughout Scotland;

6.1. There is a clear power imbalance between parents and professionals that can prevent beneficial partnership working. NDCS is often told by parents that when they are concerned about an issue, such as the level of support their child is received, they may feel ambivalent about formally raising the issue incase there are negative implications such as undermining their relationship with

\(^2\) University of Edinburgh, 2013, *Post-school transitions of people who are deaf and hard of hearing*
professionals and ultimately affecting the support their child receives. Where schools and local authorities are working to genuinely embed the principle of co-production and partnership working there are clear benefits for parents, guardians, children and young people.

6.2. In England for example, through the Aiming High for Disabled Children project co-production has been embedded across the country by way of central government funding which established local parents of disabled children forums. These forums have had much success in fostering positive partnership working between parents, local services and schools. Scotland would benefit from a similar project which would increase the networks that exist for parents and formalise how these work together with local services.

7. whether greater parental involvement in school education through the Parental Involvement Act (2006) has led to an improvement in pupil attainment;

No comments

8. whether there are any new measures that could realistically be taken (for example, by the Scottish Government, local authorities, parents' forums, the voluntary sector, etc) to help parents raise their child's attainment.

8.1. The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act places the GIRFEC principles into statute, and these include the need for children and families to always know where they can find help, and puts the child or young person, and their family at the centre. Local authorities are at different stages in implementing GIRFEC, and how consistently this is achieved across Scotland will have a great impact on the ethos services display with regards to involving and supporting parents and ultimately how equipped they are to help raise their child’s attainment. Similarly throughout the implementation of GIRFEC more work is required to ensure parents are aware of the GIRFEC guidance and framework and understand how best to use it.

8.2. There are currently no minimum standards or national guidance in Scotland on how to provide effective support to deaf learners. Peripatetic services for deaf learners are not regularly inspected or quality assured through a national framework. In addition, despite the introduction of Universal Newborn Hearing Screening in 2005, there are no accompanying set of standards or guidance in terms of how to support families and deaf children in the early years. The absence of this kind of national guidance means parents often are not clear about the types of support their child should receive and therefore how and when they should challenge services to ensure support is in place. The development of this guidance by the Scottish Government would support both local authorities and parents to help raise the attainment of deaf learners.

8.3. More support for parents and guardians of deaf children in the early years is also critical to ensure they are equipped from the earliest stage to support their child’s learning and development. There is, for example, currently no nationally funded classes to teach parents of deaf children Family Sign Language. NDCS
recommends that the Scottish Government invests in this vital opportunity for families with deaf children.

8.4. The emotional health and wellbeing of deaf learners is critical to their confidence and achievement. 40% of deaf young people are likely to experience mental ill health compared with 25% of other young people\(^3\). At the recent Deaf Learners Conference, another key theme which emerged from the young people who attended was the impact of bullying and social isolation on their confidence and wellbeing. Parents need more support to identify and address issues affecting their child’s wellbeing, this could include more tailored parenting courses, more peer support opportunities as well as more specific information about the emotional health and wellbeing of deaf young people and how to support this.

8.5. The Attainment Scotland Fund presents significant opportunities to address the achievement and attainment of the lowest attaining groups in Scotland. At the moment the fund is set up to target local authorities where there are the largest numbers of young people from the most deprived socio-economic backgrounds. However it is unclear how the funds will be used to address the attainment of disabled learners, such as those who are deaf, whose attainment is among the lowest of all. Deafness is not correlated to socio-economic deprivation and so targeting funds in this way may not benefit these learners. NDCS recommends that the Scottish Government invests a portion of the Scotland Attainment Fund into a pilot to improve the attainment of a group of learners with a particular additional support need such as hearing or sensory impairment.

8.6. There is a need to strengthen the information made available to parents so ensure they are fully equipped and empowered to help raise the attainment of their children. Parents and guardians of deaf children and those with children with other additional support needs are often looking for a local central hub of information where they can find tailored information to their needs according to their local area. While these kinds of information hubs are currently being developed across England through the Local Offer initiative there is no equivalent consistent information provision in Scotland.

8.7. NDCS recommends that resource is invested into setting up active local parent forums and that local authorities are encouraged to embed co-production practice with these forums as a key partner. The National Parent Forum Scotland does have some local groups across Scotland which would be a good starting point for this development.

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\(^3\) NHS, 2005, Towards Equity and Access
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Introduction

1.1 The National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFS) welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence for the Committee’s inquiry into the educational attainment gap and the involvement of parents. This evidence is based on the views of parents who participated in a focus group on attainment, held in Edinburgh on 12th March, and of NPFS’ representatives. It also reflects the views of parents gathered at other focus groups, local events, quarterly forum meetings, and at our annual conference.

NPFS’ role in parental involvement

2.1 NPFS was established in 2009 following the introduction of Parent Councils by the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) 2006 Act. The Forum aims to support parental involvement in education and provides a parental perspective at the national level. The Forum is parent-led and is comprised of volunteer parent representatives from each of the local authority areas, who communicate with Parent Councils and support parent involvement at the local level. Our representatives work with Parental Involvement Officers in local authorities to share information with parents. In many areas, there are local authority-level parent forums, usually attended by Chairs of Parent Councils, where local issues can be shared and concerns raised.

2.2 NPFS delivers a range of resources, events and other opportunities to help parents understand what their children are learning and to enable them to participate in their child’s school. For example, we produce ‘in a Nutshell’ leaflets clearly summarising Nationals 1-5 and new Highers in a range of subjects to help parents understand the new qualifications and support their child in making decisions about which subjects to choose. We also produce leaflets that provide an overview of assessment, skills, learner pathways and many other aspects of Curriculum for Excellence.

2.3 We also help schools understand how to engage with parents. For instance, we presented at the primary and secondary Curriculum for Excellence leadership events for head-teachers, held in 2014 and 2015. Our representatives have also presented on parental engagement at the Scottish Learning Festival ‘extra’ learning events held throughout Scotland, which are aimed at teachers.
3.1 There is a need to examine what is meant by attainment and the attainment gap. Audit Scotland’s report on School Education found that there is a lack of information about pupil performance at both the local and the national level. The measures that are currently used focus on the exam results of pupils in S4-S6. Audit Scotland found that there is little information available on wider achievement or the performance of pupils in P1-S3 available at either the local or the national level. Vocational courses have not been captured in the existing attainment measures. However, it is hoped that the Insight benchmarking tool will start to capture information about vocational courses and wider achievement as the tariffs are currently being applied to a broader range of achievements, and this will continue to increase over time.

3.2 Although there is evidence to suggest that pupil attainment has been rising over the past decade by around four percent for S4 and around five to ten percent for S5-S6, we do not currently have the evidence to comment on whether this is directly related to parental involvement through Parent Councils as created by the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) 2006 Act.

3.3 The evidence does tell us that there is an achievement gap between pupils from higher and lower-income households, and this gap is persistent. The OECD review in 2007 found that in Scotland a pupil's social background mattered more in terms of attainment than in other countries: ‘Who you are in Scotland is far more important than what school you attend, so far as achievement differences on international tests are concerned.' Research based on the 2009 PISA study found that, in relation to boys’ reading skills, Scotland’s attainment gap was the highest in the developed world, and was comparatively worse than in emerging economies such as Chile, Turkey and Mexico.

3.4 NPFS welcomes the Scottish Government’s recent announcement regarding the Scottish Attainment Challenge, which will provide £100m funding in addition to the existing Raising Attainment for All programme. The first tranche of funding will focus on the areas that have the highest concentration of primary school age children from households in deprived areas. However, targeting using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) means that pupils who are living in poverty, but not in the areas classified as the most disadvantaged, will miss out. NPFS is gathering evidence on the indicators used in the SIMD as we believe these may need updating in light of some anomalies – for instance, inner city areas in which a

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1 Audit Scotland School Education (2014) p. 18
2 Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Closing the attainment gap in Scottish education (2014) p.8
3 OECD 2007 p.15
significant proportion of residents are in privately rented accommodation. NPFS is currently in discussion with Ministers regarding this issue.

3.5 Parents have told us that they believe that there needs to be a broader and more inclusive interpretation of what ‘attainment’ means. It should encompass wider and personal achievements as well as qualifications. For example, it should encompass youth work activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh awards, which are recognised and valued by young people, parents and employers. These help young people develop the ‘soft skills’ that employers value and are particularly successful at reaching young people who are otherwise at risk of becoming disengaged from formal education. However, it important to take a ‘whole child’ approach, in keeping with the aims of GIRFEC and Curriculum for Excellence, and to recognise the strengths, aptitudes and interests of each child in the round.

3.6 However, even taking this broader definition into account, we still need to address the inequality in the education system, as it is unacceptable that there is such a persistent gap between the numeracy and literacy skills of pupils from higher and lower income households.

**Improving parental involvement**

4.1 NPFS agrees with Audit Scotland’s view that spending should be targeted on the parents, pupils and schools that need it the most. The focus should not be on raising attainment for all, as this will continue to raise the bar while not addressing the equity gap, but on supporting pupils from lower income households to achieve (which should be defined as including exam attainment, vocational courses and wider achievements) and on supporting parents from lower income households to engage and support their children’s learning.

4.2 There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that parental involvement plays a key role in closing the attainment gap. For instance, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s report found that parental involvement programmes that focus on helping parents to support their children’s learning at home have a positive impact on reducing the attainment gap. The Audit Scotland report identified parental involvement as being one of the key factors in improving pupil performance. Some studies have gone so far as to state that parental involvement is the only factor that makes a significant contribution to closing the attainment gap.

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5 Evidence from NPFS focus group with parents on attainment, 12 March 2015. Full report available on request from NPFS.
6 Ibid.
7 Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *Closing the attainment gap in Scottish education*, 2014 p.23
8 Audit Scotland *School Education* (2014) p.31
4.3 However, there are a number of barriers to parental involvement. Parents may not be able to support their child’s learning in the home due to issues such as a lack of time, or not having enough information about their child’s learning stage. Some parents may be reluctant to engage in parent councils due to a lack of confidence in public speaking, or they may be put off by a formal approach to parental involvement. Schools can also create barriers, for instance if their communication with parents is not effective, or by not providing enough opportunities for parents to participate. Schools may also have a lack of knowledge about parents’ skills and expertise and how these could potentially support their children’s learning.

4.4 Children who have lower levels of attainment may have parents who had a negative experience of school. For this reason, they may be reluctant to engage with the school, a problem which can be reinforced if they get negative messages about their child’s performance back from the school.\textsuperscript{10}

4.5 Communication from schools varies greatly, with some schools providing very good feedback and others providing very limited information. Parents have provided us with examples of where communications can go wrong - for instance, some schools not informing parents about important indications that something is not going well, e.g. a parent only being told at the end of term that their child had failed five maths tests in a row. Parents would prefer to know sooner than later if there is an issue that they need to be aware of, so that they can try and support their child. One parent attending our focus group commented that ‘I get more feedback from my garage after an MOT than I do from the school about my child.’\textsuperscript{11} More positively, parents told us about approaches that some schools have adopted to try and combat the problem of negative feedback, for instance by letting parents know (e.g. by text message) when a pupil has noticeably improved or has done something particularly well.

4.6 Parents also disengage at transition points, particularly primary to secondary. The risk of disengagement at this point can be compounded by some parents lacking the confidence to engage with secondary school subjects with which they are unfamiliar. They may also feel that their child’s homework is beyond their level of understanding. There is a need to consider how to build on the momentum in the early years, when parents are often very closely engaged and are speaking to staff on a daily basis and support this into the primary and secondary stages.

4.7 While some parents are heavily involved in their child’s education and are strong advocates for their child, it should be recognised that not all parents can or are able to have this level of involvement. A great deal is expected of parents in terms of supporting their child’s learning – e.g. encouraging them to practice their reading and writing, supporting them to do homework, helping

\textsuperscript{10} Evidence from NPFS focus group with parents on attainment, 12 March 2015. Full report available on request from NPFS.

\textsuperscript{11} Evidence from NPFS focus group with parents on attainment, 12 March 2015. Full report available on request from NPFS.
them undertake projects, making financial contributions to the school. In reality, many parents are unable to provide this level of support for reasons including poverty, mental or physical ill health, and a lack of confidence and low self-esteem. They may have literacy and numeracy issues themselves, and many have had a negative experience of formal education overall. Children from less advantaged households are less likely to experience a wide range of ‘home learning’ activities than children from higher-income households as it is more difficult for parents living in poverty to provide opportunities such as educational trips and books.\(^{12}\)

4.8 In order to redress the balance for children who do not have this level of support, we need to consider different approaches. For example, by providing short, simple, clear advice for parents, with practical examples of what they can do to support their child’s learning (e.g. reading together for ten minutes a day\(^ {13}\)) along with a flexible, open approach to communicating with and involving parents in the school, recognising that not all parents have the time or capacity to participate in parent council meetings, and that this approach may be off-putting for some parents.

4.9 There are currently a range of different projects and initiatives addressing attainment and parental engagement taking place throughout Scotland. We believe that, rather than a piecemeal approach to addressing the attainment gap with small-scale projects being done in different ways in different local authorities, a national approach to engaging with parents at the grassroots level is needed. There is a need for parent-led approaches based on identification of communities’ needs, building on existing strengths and identifying areas for development with a view to boosting skills, self-esteem and encouraging active participation so that parents feel they are equipped to participate in parent councils as well having the knowledge and confidence to support their child’s learning more generally.

4.10 Local authorities and Education Scotland can also do more to support parental involvement. For example, there are currently plans for HM Inspectors to evaluate parental involvement and family learning as part of the school and leaning community inspection process. Local authority education departments support parental involvement through the work of Parental Involvement Officers (PIOs), but many councils do not currently have PIOs and where they are in place, around half of them spend less than 40% of their time on parental engagement work.\(^ {14}\)

Other factors impacting on attainment

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\(^{12}\) Growing Up in Scotland: Early Experiences of Primary School – the transition to school (2012)


\(^{14}\) Audit Scotland *School Education* (2014) p.40
5.1 Closing the attainment gap is increasingly challenging given the cuts to school budgets being made by local authorities. For example, at the time of writing Edinburgh City Council is looking to cut 1,200 non-teaching posts. As we reported in our evidence on school budgets, English as an Additional Language support is being cut in many authorities, yet there is a growing need for this in communities throughout Scotland.\(^{15}\) NPFS’ view is that it is difficult for measures aimed at improving attainment to succeed when the support children need is being reduced.

5.2 NPFS has particular concerns in relation to additional support for learning (ASL) and are writing to the Children and Young People’s Commissioner with regards to this. Although the majority of teachers are dedicated and committed to the principles of ASL, and many schools lead the way in good practice, there are a number of recurring and significant issues that have the potential to impact negatively on the educational outcomes and well-being of children with additional support needs (ASN). Our concerns about provision for ASL are supported by research evidence such as the report undertaken by Prof. Kirsten Stalker for the Commissioner for Children and Young People in 2013,\(^{16}\) anecdotal evidence we have received from parents, and from the results of a survey for parents of children with ASN which was undertaken by NPFS in February-March 2015. Around 400 parents have responded to our survey. The findings tell us that:

42% of respondents feel that the ASL resources and support available in school do not meet their child’s needs. 30% said that their child’s support had decreased; and in terms of what specifically has been affected, 91% said that support staff/auxiliaries have reduced in number. Of those who said that support had been cut, nearly half said that they had not been involved in any discussions about the decisions that had been taken. And of those who did take part in a discussion about changes to their child’s support, 37% said they had found this discussion to be unhelpful, or only slightly helpful.

5.3 However, evidence tells us that it is not just parents who are key to improving attainment; Audit Scotland identified improving teacher quality and leadership as other significant factors. Across Scotland local authorities are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain high quality teachers, with consequent impact on children and young peoples’ education. In one local authority area, for example, class sizes in P2 and P3 have been increased as a measure for tackling a shortage of teachers at some schools.\(^{17}\) There have been reports in the national press about potential school closures in some areas of Moray and Highland due to a lack of teachers.

5.4 There would appear to be a national problem in relation to supply teachers, with particular difficulties in rural and remote areas. All of this has a

\(^{15}\) Count Us In, Education Scotland 2009

\(^{16}\) http://www.sccyp.org.uk/ufiles/It-always-comes-down-to-money.pdf

\(^{17}\) We have anonymised these examples but can provide further details on request.
negative impact on children’s learning experiences and outcomes. NPFS representatives told us:

‘My daughter’s school is short of teachers and we’ve been told that they can’t get supply teachers. I have checked with several other parents (from other local schools) as well as some teachers, and they have confirmed that supply teachers are unavailable.’

‘Parents play a vital role in supporting their child’s learning but they can only do so much, and their role should be supported by an adequately funded education system staffed by quality, motivated teachers. A good energised motivated teacher in every classroom is a fundamental part of the education process. It is key to attainment, achievement, confidence, and self-belief - the works! CfE philosophy documents explicitly state it too.’

‘The Government’s focus on closing the attainment gap is welcome, but we do have concerns that trying to do this at the same time as implementing a new curriculum, a new qualifications system and setting up Glow+ etc. is challenging. There is a need to ensure that the basic building blocks of the educational system – teachers – are in place.’

What the Scottish Government can do to close the attainment gap and support parental involvement

6.1 The forthcoming Education Bill (Scotland) 2015 contains provisions on closing the attainment gap. We believe that the Bill and the accompanying statutory guidance should address how to target pupils, parents and schools who need the most support. Otherwise, there is a risk that the provisions will not affect pupils who are living in poverty, but who are not resident in areas of multiple deprivation as defined by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. The provisions should also include a duty to support and engage with parents in order to increase their involvement both at home and in the school.

6.2 It is also important to protect pupils from the negative impact of education budget cuts. Attempts to save costs by reducing services and staff will have a negative impact on all pupils, but will have the biggest impact on those who are already struggling. As Audit Scotland stated: ‘councils also need to understand the longer term effect that budget reductions could have on efforts to raise attainment among pupils.’ Cutting the number of learning assistants, ASL provision and other cost-saving measures will not help address the attainment gap, but could, in fact, worsen it. As one measure, NPFS has suggested that the Bill should include provisions on protecting the school week, in order to stop cuts to the school week being proposed by local authorities each year.

6.3 As we have argued in previous evidence to the Committee, NPFS believes there are other ways for local authorities to save money which have less of an impact on children’s learning. For instance, Councils could share services much more than is currently the case. For instance, one means of
cost saving could be for teacher payrolls to be either delivered at the national level, or shared between several authorities.

**Conclusion**

7.1 Parents have told us that there needs to be a broader definition of what we mean by attainment, and that this should include wider achievements, personal achievements and vocational courses. The Insight tool is making some progress towards this, but this is still on going. Parents have also reported that it is good communication with schools that makes a considerable difference to their understanding and engagement.

7.2 Research evidence suggests that in order to close the attainment gap, the Scottish Government should concentrate funding on the parents and pupils who need the most support. However it will be difficult if not impossible to raise attainment at the same time as cuts to school budgets, which have a disproportionate effect on the pupils who are most in need, are being pushed through. The forthcoming Education (Scotland) Bill 2015 presents an opportunity to protect one area which is subject to cuts, i.e. the school week.

7.3 Although they play a vital role, parents are not the only factor in closing the attainment gap, and it is important that there are is an adequate number of high quality teachers, including supply teachers, available in all schools.

7.4 Parents are however expected to play a considerable role in their children’s school and in their child’s education generally. Unfortunately, not all children receive this level of support and involvement. In order to address this inequality, there is a need to support the involvement of parents from lower income households so they have the skills and confidence to participate in schools and support their children’s learning at home.

*Iain Ellis MBE, Chair chair@npfs.org.uk*

*For more information, please contact Barbara Schuler, Policy Manager policymanager@npfs.org.uk*
Evidence

There is no evidence to demonstrate which approaches used by schools have been most successful and are being used throughout Scotland. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation clearly articulates that “the lack of data, research and evaluation evidence for schools and local authorities currently hampers progress.” They continue by suggesting that Scotland needs a “national evidence base” of what positively impacts learning and professional development for teachers in how to use evidence. I think this applies to all statements within this consultation.

Reporting to Parents

Some schools will explain clearly to parents how children learn and how parents could help their development though this will be inconsistent across establishments. A prominent issue is the assumption that teachers know how to conduct parents’ evenings effectively. Training for teachers in how to conduct parents’ evenings in order that parents leave informed, and with next steps, could make significant impact in helping parents and teachers to collectively raise children’s attainment.

North Ayrshire Council in partnership with the University of Glasgow (Robert Owen Centre) is developing approaches to parental engagement. This work will be further enhanced as part of the authority’s work to close the attainment gap. A framework and action plan are being developed as part of the response to the national attainment challenge. The following questions will be the focus for that work.

- Do parents know what questions to ask of teachers in order to help their child?
- What are their expectations?
- What do they learn from reports/parents’ evenings and does it affect what they do to promote learning with their child/ren?
- What would encourage them to attend parents’ nights, particularly secondary?

Parent Councils

There has been an assumption that one size fits all, e.g., around Parent Councils. This formal structure and expectation does not always contribute to developing conducive relationships between parents from the most disadvantaged communities.
New Measures to realistically be taken

**Scottish Government:** Parents need to realise the importance of their role as co-educators. Campaigns, e.g., TV adverts to promote simple tips such as the importance of speaking with young children, could make significant impact. Media campaigns reach a diverse range of parents and so the media could be used to send out a positive message about expectations of their role, e.g., in reading to/with their child, taking them to the library regularly, engaging in fun, stimulating activities within and outwith the home. These are examples for younger children but these could be extended as to how to support study and an enquiring mind in the later years.

**Local Authority:** We would potentially benefit from reviewing our reporting processes in order to be clear on purpose and expectations for all. Do we know if our processes are effectively contributing to raising attainment and, if so, what factors are key to this?
Parent Network Scotland (PNS)
Response to call for evidence from Education and Culture Committee

Role of parents and guardians in helping to raise attainment

Parent Network Scotland commends The Scottish Government and the Education and Culture Committee in their ambition to raise attainment for all children and young people and their recognition of the correlation between parental involvement and children and young people(s) attainment.

Scotland’s communities today are extremely diverse and family structure therein may also be complex. The parenting role has many faces including parents who are biological, adoptive, step, sibling, kinship and corporate parents. In addition, our communities have a complex cultural diversity where customs and parenting style can be very different from family to family. These factors, we feel, would make it difficult to see how a ‘one size fits all approach’ could hope to achieve full parental participation across education in Scotland.

PNS recognise, from our parents feedback, that whilst schools find some parents ‘hard to engage’, parental engagement in education is an area which most parents wish to become actively involved in, however, for some there are many barriers which must first be overcome, including: time, family commitments, understanding of the education system, language, social and cultural experience and the parents own past experience of learning or their perception of being involved with or judged by professionals.

That said, our 20 plus years of working with parents demonstrate that the main barrier, regardless of culture, experience or language is confidence and here is where we would suggest that the Scottish Government concentrates efforts to attain the positive impact that parent’s involvement in both their children’s learning journey and wider community setting has on raising ambitions, expectations and economy through positive attainment of education, training and employment.

1. Whether schools always explain clearly to parents how children learn throughout their school years and how parents could help their development (e.g. with reading and wider literacy approaches)?

Parent Network Scotland recognises that Early Years and Schools work hard to engage and communicate with parents, although levels of success is different across the country; One parent commented on the vast amount of communication from school via letters which is difficult for parents where English is not their first language. Other parents commented that they cannot attend meetings due to family and work commitments and therefore miss vital information for their child’s education. Therefore, to close the gap it is clear a variety of communication formats are essential.

2. Whether schools are always flexible enough to allow parents to be involved in their child’s education (given parents’ work commitments, for example)?

This area raises a question that requires further definition, that is, “what is the definition of involvement?”
If parents are clearer on the expectation of involvement they are more likely to understand the routes to becoming involved and actively participate with confidence. Parents have discussed that school flexibility differs dependent on stage of learning (early years, primary and secondary). Our parents’ voices state that often early years and primary school engagement is easier to access than at secondary school level where often they are only encouraged to participate when there is a problem with their child.

3. The extent to which schools offer particular support to the parents of pupils from the most disadvantaged communities, in order to improve the attainment of those pupils?

PNS recognise that children & young people’s educational experience via school cannot be measured as a separate entity from their experiences gained from their families and communities. Environmental factors have a real and measurable impact on children and young people’s development, formation of attitudes, resiliency and therefore directly impact on their learning and ultimately their attainment.

Therefore, school support would need to be highly robust to offer the full breadth of support required. PNS believe that schools would benefit from engaging with community partnerships to ensure they can effectively sign post parents to gain the appropriate support required. In addition, support appeared to differ from school to school, parents commented that often school to home support is seen as a negative connotation; that is, that the intervention is due to unacceptable behaviours, low attainment, absenteeism, lateness or non-progress of their child. Pupils and parents are often supported via Home Link Officers, Guidance, School Nurse and other interventions, however, if parent-school partnerships were to become the norm these services could take on a more positive slant and parents would have the confidence to see referrals as supports rather than labels on their children.

4. Whether there is evidence to demonstrate which approaches used by schools have been most successful and whether these are being used, as appropriate, throughout Scotland?

Early year’s establishments demonstrate a strong success on involving parents as partners and offer a collaborative approach which develops parental confidence in their child’s learning and often this is then continued into the primary school. However, parents commented that often as their children becomes young adults the partnership approach reduces and there is little opportunity to engage directly with the secondary schools. An opportunity to share success between early years and secondary establishments may be beneficial to the attainment of children and the wellbeing of parents, many of whom stated a sense of loss as their input was no longer required.

5. Whether greater parental involvement in school education through the Parental Involvement Act (2006) has led to an improvement in pupil attainment?

PNS recognises that the Parental Involvement Act (2006) goes some way in ensuring that parents have a right to become involved with their child’s learning. However, we recognise that the right to become involved is not enough and some work must be done to ensure we increase parent’s confidence, knowledge, understanding and networks to ensure all parents feel they have the skills, confidence and ability to become involved.
6. Whether there are any new measures that could realistically be taken (for example, by the Scottish Government, local authorities, parents’ forums, the voluntary sector, etc.) to help parents raise their child’s attainment?

At Parent Network Scotland, we specialise in building community capacity through effective parental involvement programmes that focus on helping parents to build techniques, confidence and informal networks to support their child’s development and learning. Working with trained parent facilitators, our programme creates the confidence in parents to become active citizens within their communities by developing the confidence to become engaged.

Graduates from our core programme can opt to continue their development via our ‘Parent Link Volunteer’ programme where parents are supported to become facilitators of groups broadening the impact of our toolkit to more families. This method of peer to peer learning has grown the confidence and transferrable skills of parents to not only supporting other parents to rediscover the joy of parenting, raising their aspirations for their children’s education, regardless of their personal experience of learning.

We believe our approach of working in partnership with parents, where they build their confidence through experiencing learning in leadership, communication, relationship and nurturing toolkit directly impacts on families ability to support their child(ren) to be confident, responsible, effective and successful learners.

Our model has been developed with parents over 20 years and has been externally evaluated by Dr Barbara Kelly as having a real impact on family relationships, resiliency and confidence.

The PNS parent journey strengthens parent-child understanding, bonds and communication which has a positive impact on the parent, child and the wider community.
Dear Sir

Education Attainment Gap: Submission of Evidence
Section 3 - how parents (including guardians) and schools can best work together to raise all pupils' attainment, particularly those whose attainment is lowest.

Please find below response from Renfrewshire Council in relation to

1. Whether schools always explain clearly to parents how children learn through their school years and how parents could help their development (e.g. with reading and wider literacy approaches)

Establishments work hard to develop positive relationships with parents to ensure mutual respect and trust and a shared goal of raising the attainment of all learners. Through building good relationships there are open and clear lines of communication with regards to learning. Information sessions are organised to provide guidance to parents on how to support their children's learning, covering areas such as the curriculum, personal learning plans, assessment for learning, reading and spelling strategies, information on the use of resources, curriculum structures, learner pathways, study skills, sign posting parents to helpful websites including Education City, Bitesize, Parentzone and Nationals in a Nutshell.

Many establishments encourage parents to attend open days/evenings to share the learning experiences of the children and to encourage the involvement of parents when there are opportunities for parents to learn with their child. Evidence from establishment reviews and HMie inspections show this as an evidence of strength. Information is provided to parents in a variety of formats, some using Education Scotland templates as a support to customise information to parents. This is delivered in plain English to explain clearly to parents how their children learn and how they can help. Establishments (schools and nurseries) access Renfrewshire Council’s translation service as required.

2. Whether schools are always flexible enough to allow parents to be involved in their child's education (given parents work commitments)

The local authority and establishments continue to explore and develop flexible approaches that allow parents to be involved in their children's education. Innovative approaches such open mornings, drop in sessions, meet the teacher, show case events, end of day parent meetings, are adopted to allow parents to access and be involved in their child's learning.
3. *The extent to which schools offer particular support to the parents of pupils from the most disadvantaged communities, in order to improve the attainment of those pupils.*

The effective implementation of Renfrewshire’s Community Planning Partnership Strategy for improving outcomes for children, young people and their families, is reflected in the range of approaches adopted by establishments to build the confidence and capacity of, and accessibility by, parents from the most disadvantaged communities. This includes:

- A consistent approach to targeting support through the extended support framework - GIRFEC/ GIRFEL; child’s plan roll-out and training;
- Nurture approach;
- Evidence based parenting programmes, e.g. PPP, FAST, Incredible Years
- Early years’ strategy – Families First locality teams, Advice Works, targeted support for vulnerable families, Pizza reading group, Families First holiday clubs, voucher schemes, free meals, Early Years Teacher intervention, LAC mentoring team including a designated LAC teacher, opportunities for parents to enhance their own skills in supporting their children with early learning;
- Implementation of 600 hours flexible early learning and childcare provision;
- Implementation of national literacy strategy programmes such as Play Read Talk, Book Bug;
- Community learning and development, e.g. adult learning sessions in literacy, numeracy and ICT.

4. *Whether there is evidence to demonstrate which approaches are used by schools have been most successful and whether these are being used, as appropriate throughout Scotland.*

The implementation of Renfrewshire’s early years strategy, the early years collaborative, and raising attainment for all is at the early stages within our schools in Renfrewshire although there are early signs of positive impact e.g. the use of reciprocal reading approaches, teachers adopting an enquiring approach to improvement through the School Improvement Partnership Programme and the appropriate use of standardised testing to evidence the success of particular interventions to meet the needs of the individual child and their family. The work of Renfrewshire’s Families First locality teams is currently being evaluated by the University of Glasgow Robert Owen Centre for Educational Change.

5. *Whether greater parental involvement in school education through the Parental Involvement Act (2006) has led to an improvement in pupil attainment.*

The value of greater parental involvement in school education, through the Parental Involvement Act (2006) to engage parents in their child’s education and learning, actively participate in the life of the school and in expressing their views, is recognised. Parental Involvement is a priority in all school improvement plans. Schools and establishments work together with parents to encourage high attainment and achievement. Some parents engage well with establishments across the council however there are still hard to reach parents due to the barriers they may have e.g. difficult school experiences themselves, in full time employment or families in poverty. At this point we have no evidence that parental involvement alone raises attainment.
6. Whether there are any new measures that could be realistically taken by (e.g. the Scottish Government, local authorities, parents’ forums, voluntary sector, etc) to help parents raise their child’s attainment.

Any measures which improve the socio economic standing of parents are likely to lead to raised attainment e.g. funding to extend and spread the benefits of the work of Renfrewshire’s Families First.

An authority wide cross-sectoral working group with the aim of building effective parental engagement is currently developing guidance for establishments on engaging with parents which reflects current national advice. This has been set up to look more closely at engaging with parents and to improve pupil attainment.

This group will be linking with the National and local Parent Forum in order to consult, involve and develop a partnership arrangement in supporting establishments to build capacity within the parents to help raise children’s attainment.

The council has established a ‘tackling poverty’ commission. This group has taken evidence from a broad range of sources including the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the author of the report, Sue Ellis. The recommendations were published 13 March 2015. This will undoubtedly include a number of areas for children’s services to take forward.

I trust this is helpful to you.

Yours sincerely

Peter Macleod
Director of Children’s Services
SPTC welcomes this opportunity to submit evidence to the Education and Culture Committee of the Scottish Parliament on the topic of parental involvement and its impact on young people’s attainment. A great deal is said and written about the positive impact of parental involvement on educational outcomes for young people: we believe it is entirely appropriate that the committee undertakes a critical analysis of both practice in Scottish schools and impact of that activity on outcomes.

1. **SPTC Background**

SPTC is a long-standing parent-led charity and membership organisation providing help, advice and support to parents up and down the country. Our focus is on making parental engagement with education as good as it can be, by supporting parents and working with local authorities, schools and other stakeholders to build and share good practice. Parents are involved with school because of their child not for themselves. Any activity therefore must be directed at making the educational experience for young people as positive as it can be.

We have had both formal and informal contact with thousands of parents and carers over recent years: they have responded to our surveys, emailed and phoned with their queries and worries, spoken to our team as we work with them face-to-face at our information sessions. Our membership comprises almost 2000 Parent Councils and/or PTAs in state schools, representing tens of thousands of parents and carers.

2. **Parental Involvement in Education**

While much has been written and said about parental involvement in education, there is very little research into the topic in the UK and particularly in Scotland, where the Parental
Involvement Act of 2006 established the notion of the Parent Forum (all parents and carers with children at a school) which has the right to establish a Parent Council to represent them and take forward matters of parental interest in the school. The legislation was written to be non-prescriptive and inclusive (in contrast to the previous model of parental involvement, which was rigid and formal), with the ambition that this would encourage a more inclusive and engaging model of involvement and, as a result, improve attainment.

Nine years on, it is unclear whether this ambition has been realised. While Parent Councils have been established in most schools there is little or no evaluation of impact. School inspections by HMie do look at parental involvement but impact is not measured and the role of parents in the school community is not currently a measure by which schools are evaluated. In the school self-evaluation tool How Good is our School (HIGIOS), parental involvement is not regarded as being a high priority in the school’s performance.

In our experience, the level of support being provided at local authority level to parents and parent groups – through Parent Officers and similar – has declined significantly over the years since the Parental Involvement legislation was enacted. At that time, a great deal of time and effort was made to support the establishment Parent Councils but this has fallen away even though, by its very nature, the parent population is constantly moving and so those receiving training and support inevitably move on. A good deal of SPTC’s work is in supporting parents and parent groups as part of membership and, through that work, we aim to develop and share examples of successful partnership working between parents and schools. We have also developed a training session for school leaders which has proved to be an extremely popular and welcome support for those head teachers and senior school staff, who are often unsure about the role of parents in schools, and how to involve them.

Our view is that parental involvement continues to be seen as peripheral, not central, to the effectiveness of a school and the desire to close the attainment gap. In fact, the tenor of the dialogue in schools around parents is often negative, with parents portrayed as difficult and there to be managed or controlled: indeed they are often portrayed as part of the problem around children’s attainment, rather than part of the solution. Parents and carers are often treated by schools and local authorities as a passive audience to receive communication,
rather than partners with whom schools/authorities should work. Communication is often top-down based on what local authorities or schools want to tell parents, rather than being based on information which parents and carers want to receive.

Research has shown that family is as influential to outcomes as high quality teaching and effective schools: we therefore hold the view that the mind-set in many schools and among education professionals remains an issue to be addressed.

SPTC’s perspective on parental involvement has been heavily influenced by the academic work, and practice, of Dr Joyce Epstein, who leads the National Network of Partnership Schools based at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Dr Epstein’s work is founded on the principle that schools, parents and communities have a shared sphere of influence in relation to our children and that planned and purposeful partnership between all of those parties in this shared space makes a positive impact on outcomes for young people. Dr Epstein and her team have researched and evidenced the impact of this approach, which makes parental and community involvement integral to the work of a school.

3. Committee Questions

3.1 Whether schools always explain clearly to parents how children learn throughout their school years and how parents could help their development (e.g. with reading and wider literacy approaches).

There is little which can be said to happen consistently across all schools in Scotland and advice/information for parents is no exception to this. Without doubt there are examples of schools which do this very well, but much of this good practice rests with individual class teachers, head teachers or projects. What good practice there is tends to be in early years and the primary sector. Parents are rarely given this information at secondary school level (though the most engaged and persistent parents will pursue it). More able parents will research approaches and seek advice. The result is that, for the most part, children from more advantaged backgrounds are likely to benefit most from parental support in learning.

3.2 Whether schools are always flexible enough to allow parents to be involved in their child’s education (given parents’ work commitments, for example).
Again, there are examples of schools which work very hard to ensure flexibility, so there are many and varied ways for parents to be involved with school. However this is by no means universal and parents often complain that their opportunities for involvement are limited by inflexible and ‘one size fits all’ approaches at school. The further through school a child goes, the less flexible approaches tend to be and parents tell us conversations tend to be around issues rather than being proactive and constructive.

3.3 *The extent to which schools offer particular support to the parents of pupils from the most disadvantaged communities, in order to improve the attainment of those pupils.*

We know from research that every school has issues of deprivation and disadvantage: it is therefore incorrect to see this issue as one of difference between schools and communities – the difference is within schools. Schools – and other public services - therefore require to offer support to the most deprived families in all of our communities. Experience tells us that this is not happening consistently or effectively: once again there is good work going on but it tends to be in isolated pockets.

In many cases, the third sector and externally funded projects play a significant role in taking forward this work, rather than the school itself. The reasons for this are complex, however the flexibility and creativity of the third sector are likely to be significant factors. The capacity of local authorities and schools to define and adopt the most successful models of intervention is a challenging topic on various levels, particularly within the context of local authority funding which is leading to significant reductions in service.

3.4 *Whether there is evidence to demonstrate which approaches used by schools have been most successful and whether these are being used, as appropriate, throughout Scotland.*

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation research – Closing the Attainment Gap in Scottish Education - published in 2014, identified clearly that, while there is good practice within our schools, there is insufficient emphasis on evidence-based practice and insufficient consistency of practice. In other words, we could do a great deal better if practice were evidenced and shared, and if there were co-ordination of activity.
3.5 Whether greater parental involvement in school education through the Parental Involvement Act (2006) has led to an improvement in pupil attainment.

As indicated in Point 2, there is no evidence to support or reject this hypothesis. This would require longitudinal research, which we would very much support.

3.6 Whether there are any new measures that could realistically be taken (for example, by the Scottish Government, local authorities, parents' forums, the voluntary sector, etc) to help parents raise their child's attainment.

We believe there is sufficient evidence available regarding strategies which make an impact on children’s attainment, including the Partnership Schools model which SPTC is currently trialling with the support of Skills Development Scotland.

There is a body of evidence which supports the premise that parents have a significant influence on the educational attainment and achievement of their children: our experience of working with parents and parent groups tells us that parents – and teachers – generally look for evidenced models and practical support which they can use to guide their work. As highlighted in the JRF Foundation report mentioned earlier, we have to focus our energies on evidence-based approaches implemented consistently.

4. In Conclusion

As a parents’ organisation, SPTC is wholly committed to supporting the involvement of parents and carers in their children’s education, and to ensuring Scotland’s children have the opportunity to achieve the very best they can. We believe the legislation and policies are in place which recognise and support the central role of families in education but there remains a long way to go in terms of changing hearts and minds within the educational establishment, local authorities and schools.

Part of this is around the professional education of school leaders and teachers, where parental involvement is scarcely addressed, if at all. We also believe local authorities and schools should focus on evidence-based, practical measures which school communities are able to implement and which address the inequalities in our schools.

The Committee is well aware of the issues of funding for local authority services and the impact of reductions in services currently being experienced in schools. We also know that poverty is a growing,
not shrinking, issue in our communities. There is a huge challenge therefore to close a gap which is widening.

Eileen Prior
Executive Director
Scottish Parent Teacher Council
20 March 2015
Education Attainment Gap - Involvement of parents

The Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the study on how parents (including guardians) can best work together to raise the attainment of all pupils. Independent schools recognise that the role parents play is central to pupils’ attainment and independent schools support this recognition by the Scottish Government.

SCIS notes the increased awareness of the importance of links between parents and local authority schools as recently highlighted by a pilot scheme being rolled out by the Scottish Parent Teacher Council (SPTC) and Skills Development Scotland (SDS) to encourage greater parental involvement in schools. Independent schools recognise that parental interest and engagement means pupils are more likely to perform well and endeavour to foster this. The relationship between schools and parents is seen as a partnership in the interests of each child’s education. Most independent schools lay out the expectations of education through a parental agreement signed when a pupil joins a school.

Parental contracts vary between schools but it would generally include a statement of the expectations of pupils’ behaviour and the learning philosophy and ethic of the school. Parents agree to work with the school to ensure pupils are fully supported in learning, inside and outside of the school week. In order to maintain this collaborative relationship, parents will be kept up to date in terms of their child’s personal progress through personal learning plans, face-to-face meetings and regular communication between school and family. Schools’ communication with parents can also include email, intranet/parent portal, text messaging, social media, newsletters, blogs and school-specific apps.

The links which independent schools build with their pupils and families are intended to be life-long. This sustains a strong school community in a variety of ways. For instance, former pupils and parents may be involved in fundraising activities for new developments and towards fee assistance provision. Independent schools also often put on workshops and seminars to assist parents in supporting children in their learning. Schools dedicate resources to the creation and support of strong alumni networks that will sustain interest in the school, may provide former pupils as speakers with individual career or subject expertise for current pupils, and will ensure a continued interest in the welfare and development of the school and its pupils. The

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Development offices play an important role in maintaining these links between the school and former pupils and former parents. Social media has assisted schools in maintaining links with recent leavers.

Current parents are considered part of the school community. Parent Associations play a central role liaising with management and governance of the school and in day-to-day activities such as fundraising for particular assets. Parents of pupils attending independent schools contribute a great deal, such as giving their time to come and speak with pupils on a range of subjects, help with reading classes and other activities at a junior level, and provide assistance on school trips.

Some parents of current pupils, or former pupils themselves, will also be asked to serve on Boards of Governors and to share their professional expertise as well as their perspectives as pupils or parents. Independent schools also work hard to ensure that all prospective parents are fully aware of the financial assistance available. Currently SCIS member schools provide £45 million of financial assistance per year, of which at least £27 million is fully means-tested. There is a great deal of information about the possible routes for financial assistance on member schools’ websites. Admissions offices play a central role in providing information, advice and support to parents throughout the application process – particularly those engaging with the independent sector for the first time.

SCIS supports the Scottish Government’s view of the positive role parental involvement plays in pupils’ educational attainment and there is a great deal of work being undertaken in this area in independent schools. SCIS would be happy to provide further evidence to the Committee and individual schools are ready to provide individual experience both to the Committee and on-site.
Evidence to the Education Committee

The educational attainment gap: the involvement of parents

Introduction

The Poverty Alliance is the national anti-poverty network in Scotland, formally established in 1992. We are an independent organisation with around 200 members; with members drawn from the voluntary and public sectors, trade unions, researchers, faith groups and individuals with direct experience of poverty. Our aim is to work with others to enable communities and individuals to tackle poverty. We have a number of key policy areas that provide the focus for our activities; these are addressing low incomes, supporting services to address poverty, enhancing the participation of people with direct experience of poverty in policy development processes, and addressing attitudes to poverty.

The Educational Attainment Gap

The Poverty Alliance are pleased that the Education and Culture Committee are undertaking work into the educational attainment gap. We are particularly interested in strand three of the inquiry – the involvement of parents - and the bulk of our response will focus on this aspect. As part of our work in bringing this evidence together, we have surveyed 57 parents in order to enable us to have a better understanding of the issues they face, and how they might be resolved in order to allow parents and schools to work better together to close the gap.

Where we are

Currently in Scotland, the gap between children from low and high income families starts early. By the age of five, this gap is 10-13 months.\(^1\) Throughout primary school lower attainment in literacy and numeracy is linked to deprivation. By the ages of 12-14, those pupils from better off backgrounds are more than twice as likely to do well in numeracy.\(^2\) Low attainment is linked to destinations after school and often has long term effects on job prospects. The JRF report suggests that parental socio-economic background has more influence than the school attended, and one


of the interventions that JRF recommended do work are Parental Involvement Programmes.³

What do the pupils think?

Research by Scotland’s Commissioner for Children and Young People and Save the Children asked young people their views on poverty and education.⁴ They found that young people thought that having an education, a home, their basic needs met and a supportive family were essential to doing well in life. Young people identified a number of barriers presented to people in poverty including access to school uniforms, resources for school work and even the basics such as housing and food. While young people thought a supportive home environment was essential to their education they were very clear that this did not have to be about money.⁵ Young people recognised that support with home study could be difficult because of work demands or simply because their parents had different learning experiences.

In terms of priorities, young people said they would like to see more support for home study and highlighted better communications between school and home as being important. The young people in this group had mixed experiences of this with some suggesting that parents may not always feel comfortable going to the school to talk to parents but others were able to suggest ways in which schools had provided support to parents so that they in turn could support their child.⁶

What the parents say

Do you think schools always explain clearly to parents how children learn throughout their school years and how parents could help their development?

Only nineteen per cent of parents who responded to our survey agreed that schools always explained clearly to parents how children learnt throughout their school years and how parents could help their involvement. Over sixty five per cent disagreed.

Problems:

One of the issues that was raised by parents was the lack of information provided by schools on what their child’s learning experience would be, and how parents can feed into this at home. Parents expressed frustration with the fact that there was little guidance offered, particularly with things such as how to teach multiplication.

Parents were frustrated with the lack of updates on their child’s progress, this often only happens at parents’ evenings or on their child’s report card which often provides no specific detail in relation to areas of development. Parents felt that teachers were often so busy with their own work that parents were wary of approaching them for more information.

The issue of teachers explaining but parents not always understanding was also raised. People learn differently and parents said there had to be an understanding from teachers that this was true of parents too.

Recommendations:

Parents suggested that more regular contact between parents and teachers would be helpful. They also thought it was be useful for teachers to provide details of what children are covering in class; including a general overview of the curriculum which would enable parents to read up on the things they need to understand in order to support their children.

This needs to be more than just a handful of leaflets, and schools need to recognise that some parents will themselves also need help.

It was highlighted that when facing multiple disadvantage many parents were forced to prioritise other things over homework. It was stated that parents should be told of the importance of homework in children’s development, but that schools must recognise that some families will require that extra level of support through things such as homework clubs for those who aren’t able to get support at home.

Is your child’s school always flexible enough to allow parents to be involved in their child’s education (given parents’ work commitments, for example)?

Only a quarter of parents who replied to this question agreed that their child’s school was always flexible enough to allow parents to be involved in their child’s education. Sixty-one per cent disagreed.

Problems:

A significant number of parents who responded to our survey said that they believed schools were not flexible and very little consideration was given to working parents, particularly working single parents.

Parents complained of short notice given to attend anything at the school during the school day. Parents believed that consideration was always given to what suits teachers, and not vice versa.

Recommendations:
Schools need to be more flexible when trying to include parents. Schools and teachers must take into account the needs of working parents, especially those who are also lone parents.

To what extent does your child’s school offer particular support to the parents of pupils from the most disadvantaged communities, in order to improve the attainment of those pupils?

Sixteen per cent of parents who responded to this survey felt that their school offered lots of support to the parents of pupils from the most disadvantaged communities in order to improve the attainment of those pupils. Just under twenty-three per cent thought schools offered no support, and sixty per cent thought that there was limited support available to the parents of pupils from the most disadvantaged communities.

Problems:

One parent sent us a quote from their PTA meeting; this reads ‘if they don’t have email, they don’t want to hear what is going on in the school’. This was part of a discussion on communication with parents, and the person was trying to imply that if parents were interested in what was happening at the child’s school they would be online. This shows a horrible lack of understanding of what life is like for many people who live in poverty, not everyone has access to email and those who do not should not be excluded from discussions on their child’s education.

Similar problems were highlighted by another parent whose child attended a school which had a catchment area including a variety of income backgrounds; at this school additional support was only given if really pushed for.

Parents also highlighted low expectations for children from certain backgrounds and the fact that as a result children were not supported beyond a certain level, which was deemed ‘good enough’.

Recommendations:

It is clear that in many schools across Scotland, there is a lack of support available for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Schools should undertake Poverty Awareness Training, and ensure that all pupils, regardless of background, are encouraged and supported to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Can you think of any examples of good practice from your child’s school where parents and teachers have been brought together to improve attainment?

Some of the good practice examples highlighted to us by parents include:

- Parent teacher meetings
- Bringing parents back to the classroom to learn new ways of teaching maths
- Invitations for parents to contribute to the school’s improvement plan
• Easy to contact teachers
• Teachers highlighting particular tools to help parents contribute to their child’s education

Finally, this was one particularly good example which comes from a parent with a child in Edinburgh:

“My son is currently in P1 - Leith Walk Primary school. He had an excellent transition into school, they had a lunch club and invited parents into school to work with their children doing little activities. This then set up an excellent relationship with the school. There have been invitations into school to see them in their class and look at their progress, watch their assembly and learning about their toy project. We’ve had a formal parent night in the autumn term as well as an informative newsletter and special P1 newsletter. We had a chance to go into school to learn about paired reading, curriculum workshop and storytelling - so classes for parents! I think the school is very encouraging in letting us parents know what is going on - oh and there is a P1 kids blog which is really useful in sharing the children’s experiences and learning, also for having direct contact with the teachers if we need to ask a question”.

While these are all great examples, what is discouraging is the number of people we had who replied to this question with a simple ‘no’.

Do you think that greater parental involvement in school education through the Parental Involvement Act (2006) has led to an improvement in pupil attainment?

The majority of respondents to this question were unsure if greater parental involvement in school education through the Parental Involvement Act had led to improved pupil attainment. Just over ten per cent of parents agreed that it had and thirty per cent of parents disagreed.

Problems:

It was suggested that the Parental Involvement Act has actually widened inequalities as more confident parents took control while others were pushed to the side. Parents said that it was those parents who had time to engage, who did. For parents who are working, living in poverty and looking after their children more work needs to be done.

The issue that the Act only forced parents to participate in things they would otherwise not wish to, and therefore create animosity towards the programme, the school and the entire learning process.

Others have said that this depends on the school itself, and the role of the Headteacher and teaching staff.
One of the reasons that so many people may have responded ‘unsure’ to this question is because they may not be aware of the Act and this is raised as an issue by parents in the comments.

**Recommendations:**

There is a need for schools to ensure that parents from all communities are able to engage. This may mean providing additional funding support or capacity building but unless we can ensure that families from all backgrounds are included then inequalities will continue to widen.

It was recommended that a better approach is to admit that not all parents are able to participate, and instead have voluntary parent/child co-operatives which do not marginalise those parents that cannot participate.

There should also be more done to highlight the existence of the Act and what this means for parents.

**What new measures could be taken to help parents raise their child’s attainment?**

Some of the measures suggested by parents were:

- Better communications from schools and teachers need to take more time to build relationships with parents – especially with those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Clearer explanations to parents of the importance of their involvement and role modelling
- Greater support for those parents who having difficulties themselves in learning
- Appointing a member of staff who is responsible for parental involvement and outreach
- Workshops for parents so they are better able to understand what the curriculum is about
- Parent and teacher sessions looking at the best way to support children’s education at home
- Schools to be more flexible to allow for parental involvement

**Conclusion**

It is clear from the number of responses that we have received in a very short space of time that this is an issue parents really care about, and that parents want to be involved in their child’s education. We know that poverty can be a barrier to attainment; this was highlighted both in our survey, and in the work done by SCCYP and Save the Children with Young People. Parents have highlighted to us many examples of good practice, and their suggestions for greater involvement must be listened to. We cannot close the educational attainment gap without fully involving all parents. Schools and teachers need to work closer with parents to explain their
child’s educational experience and how parents can be involved in this. Where a child starts in life, should not determine where they end up.

More information

For further information contact:

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Policy and Parliamentary Officer

The Poverty Alliance

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Educational attainment gap – involvement of parents and guardians. Universities Scotland response

Universities Scotland shares the Scottish Government’s ambition that every person in Scotland is able and supported to achieve their full potential in a fair and just society. Universities Scotland believes that an open, joined-up and system-wide approach to raising attainment is required. One which recognises the role of all players in catalysing improvement. Critical to this is the role of families.

Underpinning attainment is aspiration and nurturing a love of life-long learning. Universities Scotland research shows parental and grandparental aspiration for children and grandchildren is very high regardless of socio-economic background; A survey commissioned by Universities Scotland in 2014 using the Scottish Public Opinion Monitor showed that 87% of respondents from the 20% most deprived areas of Scotland (SIMD20) wanted their children and/or grandchildren to go to University, compared to 86% of respondents from all backgrounds. University education is universally valued.

However, we also know that the attainment gap between Scotland’s most and least deprived pupils remains stark and is evident as young as five years of age. Family is known to be one of the key determinants of future attainment:

‘Parents and families play a key role; there is clear alignment between what the parents say they want for the young people and what the young people aspire to themselves. For policy, supporting aspirations then means working with parents as well as young people, particularly where parents face disadvantages themselves’.2

Family experience of higher education, alongside their involvement in, and understanding of, transitions through the education system are critical to growing the ambition of young people. A major study3 supported by the Nuffield Foundation in 2012 tracking over 36,000 young people in four English-speaking countries (USA, Australia, England and Canada) found that:

‘young people with university-educated parents are significantly more likely to go on to higher education and attend an elite institution -- even after prior attainment has been taken into consideration’.

Research by Office for Fair Access reflects the importance of access to higher education experience and demystifying the routes to higher education.

‘The most successful programmes of Information, Advice and Guidance interventions for under-represented groups appear to be those which start early, are personalised, integrated into outreach and other support, and address priority information needs, including HE finance, HE applications processes and requirements and employment opportunities.’4

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3 [http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/news/sharp-social-class-divide-university-entry-rates-also-found-state-schools](http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/news/sharp-social-class-divide-university-entry-rates-also-found-state-schools)
The onus is therefore on a concerted and coordinated effort involving all partners, including families, to build aspiration from an early age, including awareness of the pathways through education and help young people realise these aspirations.

We have structured our response to highlight the ways the higher education sector currently works towards raising attainment through supporting parents, and through close interaction with the education of their children at all levels and to set out the measures which we believe would lead to further success.

**A Partnership Approach to Ensure Access and Inclusivity in Support**

Scottish Universities have built an extensive network of partnerships with schools, colleges, local communities, researchers and employers to encourage a love of learning and accessible lifelong skills development for everyone, regardless of age, family circumstances or background.

The examples given below set out how universities actively engage parents and/or guardians in the activities alongside the young people and in separate parent-specific events. These are intended to encourage parents to see university as a path for their child (when it may not have been their experience), to support learning as a family, to dispel myths about university and to support parents support children through transitions e.g. applications to university:

- Scotland already has two well-established *Children’s Universities*\(^5\) (CU) run by the University of Strathclyde and Queen Margaret Universities respectively, and two newer centres in Dundee and Aberdeen, which offer pupils aged 7 to 14 (and 5 and 6 year olds with their families) the opportunity to learn with their families beyond the classroom – everything from child-friendly lectures about anatomy to city treasure hunts to street dance workshops, delivered by accredited partners such as museums, sports clubs, universities, community partners and after-school clubs.

  In 2013-14 CU Scotland recorded over 2500 hours of learning.

- The national programme for school and university relationships, the Schools for Higher Education Programme, operates in four regions across Scotland through Focus West, the Lothians Equal Access Programme for Schools (LEAPS), Lift Off (Fife and Tayside) and Aspire North\(^6\). The Programme works with over 100 schools and local councils to provide additional support, guidance and encouragement for pupils and their families from S3 upwards in schools with low progression rates to higher education. For example, Focus West employed a Families and Schools Partnership Officer to support parents to foster and develop their children’s learning in turn. Parents are supported via seminars, workshops, one-to-one consultations and telecommunications to engage with their child’s homework and future planning. Between January and June 2010, 165 parents from eight FOCUS West schools were fully engaged in the new FOCUS on Families pilot. FOCUS West delivered 12 interactive workshops, gave six FE/HE presentations at school information evenings, attended four parent evenings, and contributed to several parent council meetings during that time.

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\(^5\) [http://www.childrensuniversity.co.uk/local-cus/children%27s-university-scotland/about-cu-scotland/](http://www.childrensuniversity.co.uk/local-cus/children%27s-university-scotland/about-cu-scotland/)

The University of Edinburgh’s *Educated Pass*\(^7\) initiative aims to reach some of the groups least likely to apply to university, to raise aspirations and attainment, and to encourage early awareness of employability. 13-16 year old boys are targeted through their local football clubs, and their football coaches.

Parents are engaged early on, with a session aimed specifically at parents discussing typical academic progression from S2 to S6 and learner pathways. This allows both parents and coaches to reinforce the ethos of Educated Pass, and introduces the scheme as a reliable future source of guidance.

The programme is succeeding in its goals. Of the first cohort of boys to participate in the initiative in 2006-7:

- 67% progressed to higher education compared to the national average of 36%
- Five members of the original cohort went onto study at the University of Edinburgh, and one joined a professional football team in Scotland.

Glasgow Caledonian University established the *Caledonian Club* in 2008 which works with children from nursery age upwards, their teachers and their families to raise educational aspirations through tailored activities and projects such as drama for nursery pupils with follow up sessions for parents, to ‘a day at university’ shadowing experience for S5 and S6 pupils and a pupil and parents evening covering university applications and support.

The Open University works alongside Glasgow Caledonian in supporting the *Caledonian Club*, specifically to raise the educational aspirations of parents in areas with low progression rates to university. In the first instance, parents with a child at one of two schools in Glasgow are offered a free five-week course based around the OU open educational resource, the Reflection Toolkit\(^8\). This is facilitated by Caledonian Club staff and student mentors, and includes IT support and in situ childcare. Parents can then elect to take a 20 week ‘Openings’ short course, which offer a gentle introduction to study at higher education level. Parents who register on OU courses are supported by staff to meet in study buddy groups to build the confidence of participating parents, through offering peer support in an informal setting. The Open University is currently developing a new resource and website which will guide parents from informal to formal learning, starting with free, on-line OU material and moving to Open Courses.

Aim4Uni at the University of Aberdeen supports parents within low progression target schools to ensure that pupils with the potential to study at university are encouraged and supported to do so. The University offers support both through in-school events such as parents evenings and Careers information sessions and through bespoke parents’ events throughout Scotland. These cover the application and offer process, finance planners and funding information, and current student guides covering accommodation, student life and support. For parents who cannot attend in person, the University also holds online events covering the same information at times that parents may find it easier to attend.

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Scottish Universities undertake world-class research in the field of education, shaping national and international policy and practice in early years education, teacher training and parental support. For example, recent research by the University of Edinburgh\(^9\) identified some parental difficulties in successfully resolving disputes around additional support needs for pupils in school. ‘Qualitative case studies revealed that young people and parents, particularly those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, lacked access to advocacy services charged with helping them to realise their rights’. The university-led project aimed to raise awareness of parent’s and children’s rights in relation to additional support needs and methods of avoiding and resolving disputes with schools and local authorities and support parents involvement in their child’s education.

The research directly informed legislation - the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009 - relating to school and local authority duties on data gathering and access to information for parents and young people with additional support needs, and has resulted in an increased take-up of mediation services.

**New Measures for Success in helping Parents, Teachers and Children Raise Attainment**

The Scottish HEI sector actively supports lifelong learning and development through direct provision and partnership activities (linking schools, colleges, local communities, employers and parents/guardians) from pre-school age upwards.

Scotland’s HEIs are eager to continue to build on this success. Universities Scotland would ask that:

- Recognition of parental aspiration and awareness of opportunities (alongside their own attainment) as key determinants in a young person’s aspirations
- That current activities undertaken by universities to break down barriers and engage young people and their parents in university are recognised (and financially supported to continue and expand these)

**Further information**

Dr Louise Ker, Policy Officer (Learning & Teaching) Universities Scotland

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\(^9\) [http://results.ref.ac.uk/DownloadFile/ImpactCaseStudy/pdf?caseStudyId=23997](http://results.ref.ac.uk/DownloadFile/ImpactCaseStudy/pdf?caseStudyId=23997)
Improving Parental Engagement
Wester Hailes Education Centre, Edinburgh

- Current roll 300 pupils.
- 42% pupils receive free school meals.
- 32 teaching staff.
- Area of socio-economic deprivation.
- Much work undertaken in recent years to improve attainment and achievement across all years.
- Every student participates in daily mentoring and is expected to engage fully with their own learning.
- Student reports updated monthly for all years.
- 2012/13 across years 30% parents attendance at parents evenings.
Past Process and Barriers

• Parent Council approached and asked to engage the community in consultation to improve parental engagement.

• Previously followed the ‘traditional’ parents evening method - one night, lots of different teachers, lots of waiting around.

• Parents were struggling with time management, childcare issues, shift patterns, their own barriers to learning, poor past school experiences and feelings of shame/embarrassment.

• In particular we felt that often staff were writing reports for themselves – using language we understood and ‘teacher talk’ for common problems. We needed to consider the parent and the student reading the report and how we could, as a service, become more ‘user friendly’.

• Parent engagement was identified as part of our whole school improvement plan.
What are we Trying to Achieve and Why?

• We want to enable more active participation with the parent meeting process and engage more with our Parents/carers

• We hope this will lead to:
  • Improved attendance of parent meetings.
  • Improved communication with parents/carers and students about their learning.
  • Faster responses to issues raised by parents/carers.
  • Improved student responsibility for their own learning.
  • Quality responses based on a whole child approach.
  • A support to improve attainment.
Consultation

- **Working group**: Set up to look at the concerns and suggest draft process.

- **Senior Team**: New process was then discussed with the Senior Team and any improvements suggested.

- **CLs/SLs**: Draft proposal was then discussed with the Curriculum and Support Leaders and any improvements made.

- **Parent Council**: The new proposal was then presented at the Parent Council and received any feedback.

- **Whole Staff**: All teaching staff were involved in a session on looking at the new process and discussed how it was going to be implemented.
What are we trying to accomplish?

**Improved Parental Engagement**

How will we know that a change is an improvement?

**Increase in Parent’s Attending Meetings**

What change can we make that will result in improvement?

**Parent Need System**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>PLAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff agreed change was required</td>
<td>Time frame set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin Support set up</td>
<td>Delivery of meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allocation of Staff</td>
<td>Quality feedback recorded centrally</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDY</th>
<th>DO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collation of Figures</td>
<td>1st phase complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation with Parent/Staff/Students</td>
<td>(Sep-Dec)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report back to all staff</td>
<td>2nd phase started</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
New Parent Meeting Process

After consultation the new process was agreed

• Step 1: Students in each mentor group are allocated a meeting with either their Mentor, Support Leader, Support for Learning Leader of DHT.

• Step 2: Admin staff contact Parents/Carers to come in for a meeting during a 2 week opening with a time that suited them and the mentor.

• Step 3: Mentor meets with Parent/Carer and student for a 20 min meeting to discuss the student’s learning using their monitoring and tracking report. The mentor also completes a feedback form with positives, concerns and extra curricular info as a recording of the meeting.

• Step 4: Feedback form is passed to Support Leader so any concerns can be dealt with and keeps a copy centrally. The copy of the form will also be taken to the next meeting as a point of reference if required.

Every student will receive at least two parent/carer meetings through out the school year.
## 1st Phase Parent Meetings
### Sep-Dec 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Group</th>
<th>Total Students</th>
<th>Total Student Parent Meetings</th>
<th>% Total 2013</th>
<th>% Total 2012/13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S6</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>288</strong></td>
<td><strong>211</strong></td>
<td><strong>73%</strong></td>
<td><strong>30%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Overall Parent Meetings 2013/14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Group</th>
<th>Total Students</th>
<th>Total Students with Parent Meetings</th>
<th>% Total 2013/14</th>
<th>% Total 2012/13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S6</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parent feedback

• 90% of parents surveyed rated the new system as Excellent or Very Good.
• The remaining 10% rated the new system as Good. These 10% were all senior parents.
• ‘Don’t need to wait’
• ‘I like that’s it’s private’
• ‘Easy to understand’
• ‘It gives you an overview and you can concentrate on the problem areas’
• ‘You can go over what was said before’
• ‘Enjoyed meeting just one teacher’
• ‘More flexible with times’
Staff and Student feedback

• Overwhelming support from staff. All rated the new system Good to Excellent.

• Reliant on quality feedback supplied once a month from all teaching staff for all students.

• Improved relationships with staff and students.

• ‘Made for some interesting discussions on the whole child and not just the academic side’

• ‘More responsibility expected of students’.

• ‘Students engage more in meetings’.

• ‘I feel that I am more of an effective mentor having the contact with home’

• Junior students rated the new system highly. Senior students more resistant to the changes and further work will be done in this area.
Addressing concerns – next steps

• Addressing mind set issues surrounding senior school.
• Addressing quality feedback across the school and quality dialogue with all students.
• Continuing efforts to contact hard to reach parents.
• ‘Get to Know the Teachers’ event in discussion for new intake S1.
Insights on Change Happening

• As in any school attitudes to change can be complex and many factors should be taken into consideration when analysing feedback.

• Communication was essential from the start not only to evaluate the previous process and its barriers but also to involve parents/carers on what they would prefer.

• Evaluation was also key to getting the process right and now that we have completed our 1st year it is evident from the results that it has made an impact.

• We still have improvements to make and with further communication with staff, parent/carers and students we hope to be able to tailor it to be even more successful.
Response from Who Cares? Scotland to the Education and Culture Committee’s call for evidence on the educational attainment gap – Involvement of Parents

About Who Cares? Scotland

Who Cares? Scotland supports young people who have care experience up to 26 years of age, by providing on-going support and independent advocacy. We are the only organisation in Scotland to provide this service. Who Cares? Scotland aims to provide looked-after young people in Scotland with knowledge of their rights and strives to empower them to positively participate in the formal structures they are often subject to solely as a result of their care experience. At Who Cares? Scotland we utilise the voice of the care experienced population to inform everything we do as an organisation. Most recently we have published research that sought to ascertain care experienced young people’s interpretation and views of the new Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. 87 care experienced young people contributed to the research. This research can be accessed [here](#) and we would encourage the Committee to read the report in full.

Background

Who Cares? Scotland has already responded to the Committee’s call for evidence on the educational attainment gap part 1 which sought information on the Commission for Developing Scotland’s Workforce. Within our previous response, we acknowledged some of the poor education outcomes of the care experienced population and we would encourage the Committee to refer to this information for context.

This call for evidence focuses on the involvement of parents in addressing the educational attainment gap. However the care experienced young people we work in partnership with have often been subject to statutory intervention as a result of inadequate or unwilling parenting. These young people often progress through education with little support or input from their biological parents – something which we as an organisation believe is an important area for the Committee, and those working in education, to be mindful of. We do believe however, that corporate parents, as identified within the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, should help in mitigating against the deficit in support from parents that this particular group of young people may experience.

- Do schools always explain clearly to parents how children learn throughout their school years and how parents could help their development (e.g. with reading and wider literacy approaches)?
Our experience of providing independent advocacy informs us that schools are inconsistent in how they inform carers and support staff on how care experienced young people learn throughout their school years. Care experienced young people have required state intervention in their lives as a result of deficits in their needs. The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, will ensure that corporate parents will be required to work in a multi-disciplinary manner to ensure care experienced young people are best supported. Partnership working is essential in ensuring that the young person is supported in a holistic way and this support has to be effective enough to ensure looked after children and young people are able to achieve their full potential in education.

Schools should know of how many of their pupils are care experienced and should actively pursue building good professional relationships with those placed in charge of caring for the young person out of school hours. Efforts should be made to ensure that a young person’s accommodation placement is provided with sufficient guidance to enable them to assist in the educational and personal development.

It is imperative that those working in education should be able to advocate clearly the educational needs to all those supporting young people. It is common for care experienced young people to have multiple placement moves during their care journey. Education staff should ensure that disruption to schooling is as limited as possible. In the event of a young person’s living placement changing, in a planned or emergency basis, then education staff must ensure that new carers and support staff are made aware of how to best support the young person in education as quickly as possible.

Additionally, in the event that a home placement move results in the young person having to move to another school, the transfer of data related to the young person should happen effectively and timely manner. This will ensure that disruption to the young person is limited, and that professionals are aware of the needs of the young person.

In 2014, Who Cares? Scotland responded to the Equal Opportunities Committee’s follow up inquiry into ‘Having and Keeping a Home’. This response sought the direct views of care experienced young people on what it is like to leave care and manage independent living. The young people we spoke to in this spoke at length about the impact of multiple placement moves and the disruption that this can bring. In order to better understand how this can impact on those with care experience, we would urge the Committee to read the short report which can be accessed here.

- The extent to which schools offer particular support to the parents of pupils from the most disadvantaged communities, in order to improve the attainment of those pupils.

Education is a protective factor that we should all be able to achieve. It provides us with the soft skills required to function in the workplace, expands on our academic knowledge and provides a place to learn how to socially interact with others appropriately. The care experienced child, and those at risk of becoming care experienced, must too be able to achieve this protective factor.

We at Who Cares? Scotland are aware from our advocacy experience that it can be difficult at times for those delivering education to effectively build good working relationships with parents.
living chaotic lifestyles. It is essential however, that schools are accessible to all parents, regardless of situation, in order for all children to have the best chance of achieving in education. Where contact and engagement is difficult to achieve with parents or carers then we believe that a multi-disciplinary approach should be taken. Parents need to be provided with insight and knowledge of how to support their child, in order to address the educational attainment gap.

The care experienced population are subject to many formal processes which involve a range of professionals, from a variety of disciplines. In order for the young person to achieve in education, despite other factors out with their school career, teaching staff must have the courage to advocate strongly on how to best enable the young person to achieve in education. When attempting to meet the holistic needs of any young person, it is important that the educational needs are not neglected.

Through the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 and the duties now placed on 24 specific corporate parents, we will be better enabled than ever to provide care experienced young people with well rounded support and opportunities. Those providing education services must be aware of their duties as corporate parents, as well as the duties placed on others, to ensure that this Act is able to deliver on its intention. With all corporate parents being encouraged to work alongside each other, and hold each other to account, we can attempt to ensure that looked after young people and care leavers can be provided with a better experience growing up. Where there is a lack of biological parental support in a child’s life, we must understand how to use this legislation to improve their education experiences; and ultimately their future life chances.

If you wish to discuss this further please contact:

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Carly Edgar, Senior Policy Development Officer: cedgar@whocaresscotland.org
Submission from Christine Hamilton

I would like to contribute my views on your enquiries into how Scotland can help address any educational attainment gap. As a mother of 5 children I have been involved in the Scottish education system for 23 years – as a parent. I have been an active member of Parents Associations & Parent Council at different periods over the last 23 years.

With the introduction of CfE I had great anticipation for the benefits that CfE could bring for my children and all children in Scotland. However in the last few years I have become increasingly uneasy about the lack of attainment information available to me regarding my childrens education. My eldest child who is now 26 went through the 5-14 curriculum, looking back I was a very informed parent in regard to her educational development, I knew when the national testing was taking place and how well she was progressing in school. Occasionally I would know her actual national testing score. I knew the different Levels A to F and had the security of knowing that she was coping well and moving through the levels.

Now at Primary level CfE I have no knowledge on how my other 4 children are progressing. I am becoming increasing frustrated that I am less informed now than I was under the 5-14 frameworks. I thought through CfE that gaps in my children’s education would be more easily identified and feed back to me as the parent – who then, as an informed parent with specific details on my child individual education needs could try to help my child in the areas that they were struggling with.

If parents are not getting feedback on key educational stages in their child’s development, how can we as parents possibly help them? Schools/education departments need to do more to inform parents of any assessment’s (if any), more detailed progress & any specific learning difficulties, only then can parents effectively work in partnership with their school and help raise all pupils’ attainment.

At the moment parents do not really have a clue about CfE or what the framework is trying to achieve. Education Scotland’s website is very good and gives great information regarding attainment & assessment all of which I strongly agree with and support! However the theory is not happening at grass roots level, parents are becoming more and more disenfranchised. Someone needs to take the reins of CfE and steer all Councils in the correct direction otherwise we are going to have more children falling through the ever widening attainment gap.

I hope your consultation findings help make significant improvements to Scotland education system and allow all children in Scotland to reach their full potential.

Christine Hamilton

Parent of children attending Glasgow City Council Primary & Secondary Schools
Evidence to the Education and Culture Committee’s Inquiry into the Attainment Gap: Involvement of parents

1. Introduction
Save the Children welcome the opportunity to submit evidence to the Education and Culture Committee on how parents and schools can best work together to raise pupil’s attainment, as part of the inquiry into the attainment gap. This evidence is informed by Save the Children’s work in the last few years to highlight the impact of poverty on children’s learning and the need to focus on the achievement gap and our experience of delivering support to families of primary aged children disadvantaged by poverty, including through the delivery of the Families and Schools Together (FAST) programme. The evidence also draws on focus groups with parents/carers of primary aged children living in deprived areas with whom we work.

Parents and carers play a vital role in children’s learning and development. We therefore particularly welcome the focus of the inquiry on the role of parents and guardians in helping to improve children’s achievement. Parents who take on a supportive role in their children’s learning make a difference in improving achievement at all stages of education and learning. Yet, poverty can disadvantage children’s learning and impacts on the support parents are able to provide. In order to ensure a comprehensive approach to tackling the achievement gap between children living in poverty and their classmates, developing approaches that support parents disadvantaged by poverty to positively engage in their children’s learning is an area that requires increased attention.

2. Key messages
Save the Children wish to highlight a number of key themes before concentrating on specific areas of interest to the Committee. To improve support to parents, make progress in closing the achievement gap and raise pupil’s achievement the following issues are critical:

i. Prioritising parental engagement – It is important that we have a shared understanding on what we mean by parental involvement and what elements of this make a difference to children’s learning. We believe that the focus of policy and support should be parental engagement - helping parents living on low incomes to use appropriate strategies to support their children’s learning at home. Evidence points to this being the area of parental involvement that can buck the trend for children experiencing poverty and close the attainment gap. Whilst there is an important role for other areas of parental involvement such as parental representation in schools – there is less evidence of the impact of these on closing the gap.

ii. Prioritising support for children and families affected by poverty – A focus on raising attainment for all will not be enough in itself to make progress on tackling the achievement gap. In order to break the link between socio-economic disadvantage and learning outcomes a clear and determined focus on support for this group of children and their families will be required (alongside wider strategies to address the causes of low income).

iii. Taking an evidenced based approach – Evidence can help educators and policymakers understand how best to support families who are economically disadvantaged in engaging with their children’s learning. Interventions should be based on robust research evidence and rigorously monitored to assess whether they are meeting intended outcomes. More attention is needed to identify, promote and invest in support based on what we know works and is most effective. Not using research to develop and evaluate support for parents can waste resources, achieve no improvements or even lead to harmful effects.
3. Specific Questions
The remainder of this response will provide evidence in response to the key areas the Committee have requested specific information on.

1. Whether schools always explain clearly to parents how children learn throughout their school years and how parents could help their development (e.g. with reading and wider literacy approaches)

When families and schools work together, children do better. Schools, educators and families recognise the importance of families and schools working together and supporting parents to understand how their children learn. Our research has found that young people also recognise the importance of communications between school and home. Save the Children believes that it is important that parents understand how children learn throughout their school years as well as how they might help them to develop. This knowledge is critical for parents to be able to support their children to achieve and get on. Research has shown that children who benefit from sustained, positive, parental engagement in their learning at home can achieve well at school, regardless of their family income.

The types of information and support offered to parents are important. It is difficult to assess whether schools always explain clearly to parents how children learn and the role parents and carers can play as there are so many different approaches used within and between local areas and schools. From our experience of working in deprived areas, we find that the way in which schools support parents in this respect is working well in some schools and for some parents. However, we are also aware that schools are not always supporting parents as effectively as they could, particularly in the most deprived areas. There are significant inconsistencies within and between schools. There are also a number of factors that can act as barriers, discourage or inhibit parents’ involvement in their children’s education and contact with the school, for example parents' own experience of school education may have been negative and this may undermine their confidence to engage with the school or simply parents had different learning experiences.

The experience of parents of primary aged children living in deprived areas that we work with highlight a number of challenges for ensuring that parents are supported effectively:

- **Parents lack understanding of how to support learning at home:** Parents feel they lack the skills and knowledge to help their child to catch-up or progress. They can feel confused by homework tasks and unsure about their role in supporting their completion. They are particularly concerned that they do not understand the methods they should be using to support their child’s learning effectively.

- **Parents do not feel they know enough about how their child is achieving:** Parent’s evenings and annual progress reports are common ways in which information about children’s progress are communicated to parents. These events are felt to be too infrequent (often annually) and too short to provide the level of detail parents need. They feel that specific issues with children’s development are often identified by schools without providing guidance for parents on how to address them.

- **Parents are devising their own strategies in the absence of appropriate support:** Parents often describe having to create their own ways of helping their children complete work at home, for example when learning to read and write. Many parents also sought support from one another to work through challenges and problems – seeking guidance from other parents who were facing the same difficulties. These strategies can be helpful, however, they can also provide conflicting messages and less effective support for children to get on and improve.
In addition, parents identified examples of the type of practical support they would find helpful:

- **Opportunities for in-school observation** e.g. through parents watching lessons as they happen in school.
- **Coaching on how to support learning at home** e.g. access to programmes that focus on using appropriate tools and learning techniques.
- **Instructions accompanying homework** e.g. providing information on the purpose of tasks and tips on how to support children to complete them.
- **Regular snapshots of children’s progress and areas for improvement** e.g. portfolios from school including detailed examples of work and comments from teachers on key areas. This type of profile was felt to be more readily available in nurseries.

We are beginning to understand the key ingredients of successful approaches to support parents to engage effectively in their child’s learning. Evaluations suggest that the most important factor is good communication between parents and professionals. Education authorities and schools need to ensure that their home-school communication arrangements are appropriate for all parents. Parents can build knowledge and skills when time is taken to discuss their child’s learning and development with practitioners. The Education Endowment Foundation has found that the most effective strategies in schools in England focus on guiding parents with the small, practical steps they can take at home to boost their child’s learning. Support is ideally delivered by trained professionals and focuses on the ways in which children learn and are taught at school (JRF 2014). Our experience of delivering the Families and Schools Together (FAST) programme also suggests that play-based methods can help families ‘model’ behaviours and replicate effective activities at home. We urge the committee to examine how consistently the existing evidence base is being used to inform the ways in which schools are engaging and developing support for families in poverty.

2. Whether schools are always flexible enough to allow parents to be involved in their child’s education (given parents’ work commitments, for example)

The way support is provided is key to effectively engaging parents’ living in poverty in their child’s learning (ENQIN 2010). There is a lack of information at national level about how schools are engaging with parents and whether this is done flexibly. We recognise that schools are under considerable pressure to support diverse groups of parents and the challenges in providing support in a way that suits all families. Schools do an admirable job in fostering learning and achievement for the majority of children in Scotland. However, many families are not receiving the support they need, in the right ways. Ensuring parents have access to appropriate support, at the times and in the ways they need it is essential to help to close the attainment gap.

Many parents we work with say they need greater flexibility in the support they receive from schools. Schools must take increased account of the circumstances of low income parents. Low income working parents often work longer hours, work outside normal working hours and/ or have inconsistent work patterns. This can create practical barriers to engaging with their child’s education. Balancing work and childcare can also be an issue, especially for lone parent households. Parents of primary school children living in deprived areas told us that resources and support schools have to offer are not always available to families at the times they need it. Parents describe some schools that are unwilling or unable to find alternative times to meet with parents who can not attend important events within the school, such as parents’ evenings as a result of evening/inflexible work patterns. Parents also feel that schools and teachers can lack an understanding of the realities of living on a low income and families’ circumstances at home which can lead to less
positive relationships or inappropriate support being provided. Parents can feel stigmatised and therefore less likely to engage with schools. Parents with low literacy levels may also find it difficult to engage (and they may be unwilling to disclose this) with schools and require communication and support in different ways.

**Save the Children believe that flexible support for parents to engage in their child’s education should be part of the mainstream of Scottish education.**

Evidence from England about what works in this regard, suggests that this means having high expectations of parents and building their confidence and engagement with schools, for example by supporting them to address wider family needs, meeting them on neutral ground (at home or outside school) and finding creative ways of engaging with parents.¹⁹

Practical suggestions from parents include one-to-one meetings as a regular part of parent-teacher communication and group support e.g. through opening school facilities for longer hours and providing spaces for parents to help children complete homework. The Early Learning Partnership Parental Engagement Group (ELPPEG) in England points out the risks when schools rely on a limited number of sessions with parents, using set formulae to ‘change’ parents over a short period of time.²⁰ We believe that effective strategies for parental engagement should be built-in to the way in which schools support children across every aspect of the curriculum and school life. There are examples of innovative approaches that can be effective in Scotland.²¹ However, it is unclear how consistently these are replicated across the school system. We suggest the committee examine this in more detail. We believe that examples that are working well for children must be made more widely available.

3. **The extent to which schools offer particular support to the parents of pupils from the most disadvantaged communities, in order to improve the attainment of those pupils**

**Families experiencing socio-economic disadvantage are as likely – sometimes more so – to be involved in their child’s learning.** However, their efforts are likely to be less effective; especially when they have low educational attainment themselves (JRF 2014). Income poverty significantly disadvantages children’s learning and impacts on the support parents are able to provide at home. This can be because they have fewer resources to invest in their child’s learning at home and to support the costs of school and/or because of the impact of stress on the time and attention they can dedicate to these activities.²² The importance of access to and quality of support for this group of families is therefore important. Parental involvement that does not effectively reach all families has the potential to widen gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their better off peers.

**Our experience is that coverage and quality of additional support for parents of pupils from the most disadvantaged communities to help improve their child’s attainment is variable.** This is based on our experience of delivering the FAST programme in schools in some of the most deprived areas in Scotland. Initiatives are often driven by short term funding priorities and not joined up for families across their child’s education. There is also inconsistency in using approaches based on the evidence of what works. It is our experience that delivery of effective support for low income families is best achieved when this is a clear strategic priority at local authority level.

**Save the Children believes that a priority should be to ensure that all parents experiencing poverty have access to support that helps them to engage in their child’s learning, should they need it.** Effective parental engagement in children’s learning can help to buck the trend for children experiencing poverty and close the attainment gap. There has been a tendency for schools to introduce ‘parenting programmes’ to provide better opportunities for support. These typically provide more structured support for families and are provided by partners, often in the third sector. Evidence shows
these can be effective at helping to close the achievement gap (JRF 2014). However, they are only reaching small numbers of children and families who can benefit. Other approaches that have been tried include identifying a lead professional in every local authority or school to take forward parental engagement work. This has tended to focus on building connections between homes and schools to improve communication. Our experience of delivering the FAST programme highlights the benefits of developing multiagency approaches within schools to break down barriers between school and home, through running sessions after school, in the school building using fun, interactive activities.

There is emerging evidence of the specific strategies that can have an impact on the achievement gap (JRF 2014). There are also examples of how this is being provided effectively in some places and individual schools. Whilst we welcome this, there is a need to better understand which approaches are working - and how consistently they are being made available (more detail on these points is provided in response to question 4). There are practical challenges to overcome in ensuring the success of approaches that have been shown to work. For example, with recruiting parents to interventions and keeping them engaged. This can be a particular issue in deprived areas and for parents experiencing poverty.

4. Whether there is evidence to demonstrate which approaches used by schools have been most successful and whether these are being used, as appropriate, throughout Scotland

Evidence shows that increasing parental engagement can help to close the achievement gap (JRF 2014). The Education Endowment Foundation finds that parental engagement programmes have led to around five additional months’ progress in a child’s early development over the course of a year. Two recent meta-analyses from the USA have also suggested that increasing parental involvement in primary and secondary schools had an average of 2-3 months positive impact. Whilst we know it is important, far less is known about how to increase parental engagement, particularly in low income communities. Many of the highest quality studies are from the USA, which suggests a need to look beyond Scotland for evidence of what works.

The most successful strategies focus on giving parents strategies to support children’s learning - based on the way children learn and are taught at school. This includes effective strategies to tutor children, making space for completing homework and sharing enjoyable books. Successful interventions have also been shown to use qualified practitioners to deliver this support; run in group based settings and run for a longer duration. Support is also strengthened when multiple strategies are combined including a mix of universal and targeted support. A number of studies have identified the positive impact of encouraging parents to talk with their children as well as developing parents own skills. There is growing evidence of specific programmes that can have impact (see Education Endowment Foundation). A study in England argued that schools performing well for disadvantaged students have a ‘common mind-set’ - one in which leaders use evidence carefully, look beyond their local context, seek to compare themselves to the best and be ambitious in how they define success. While this report is based on schools in England, Save the Children believe that the findings should be considered in the Scottish context.

The Families and Schools Together (FAST) programme has growing evidence and recognition of success in Scotland. FAST is an award-winning, UN-endorsed, evidence based programme that brings together parents, children, teachers and the wider community. It supports families by helping children improve their skills in reading, writing and maths; helping parents get more involved in their child’s education so that they can
support learning and development at home and encouraging stronger bonds between parents and their child, their child’s school, other parents and the wider community.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2014) highlights FAST as an example of a programme that is showing promise in the Scottish context. It has a number of advantages. It is voluntary with high retention rates - 77% of families complete FAST in Scotland, a particularly high rate compared to other programmes. It reaches large number of disadvantaged children and families – up to 40 families per cycle. It strengthens relationships within and between families and breaks down the barriers between home and school – 20% increase in parental involvement. It is rigorously monitored. Save the Children has been supporting delivery of FAST in Scotland since 2010. Between 2010 and 2014, FAST in Scotland has been delivered to 1,316 families and 2,399 children.

Research and evidence data are not being routinely used in Scotland to guide policies and approaches to close the gap (JRF 2014). There is increasing recognition and awareness of evidenced based programmes in Scotland. However, we are concerned about the extent to which these are used to inform practice and interventions in schools. Programmes and approaches used in schools can lack a robust research basis and are not properly evaluated for their impact on children’s outcomes. The Scottish Government has developed a specific online resource to support consistent application of evidence based practice. We suggest that the Committee examines how this is being used at local level. In particular, we urge the Committee to look at how evidence is being embedded as part of initiatives taken forward through the Scottish Government’s Raising Attainment for All initiative. This involves twenty three local authorities and includes a specific focus on testing practice interventions to support parental involvement and close the attainment gap.

5. Whether greater parental involvement in school education through the Parental Involvement Act (2006) has led to an improvement in pupil attainment

The impact of the Parental Involvement Act on children’s attainment has not been thoroughly assessed in Scotland. The Act gives parents the right to be more involved in their children’s learning and makes local authorities responsible for promoting – but not for supporting - parental involvement in learning at home. Save the Children is not aware of any recent evaluation of the impact of this legislation on children’s attainment.

Whilst there is a role for wider parental involvement, we believe that support for parents to engage in their child’s education is more important for closing the gap. Evidence shows that simple activities parents do with their children such as reading and sharing stories, helping children with homework and even speaking to a child about what they have learnt at school can improve children’s outcomes and help to reduce the impact of poverty on children’s attainment (JRF 2014). There is general consensus that this kind of engagement in children’s learning has greater benefits than parents’ involvement in other aspects of school life (such as volunteering in a classroom, fundraising, joining parent-teacher councils or inputting into school governance and decision-making). This is not to say these activities are not valuable but that engagement in learning at home has higher impact. There is currently no statutory requirement or guidance for parental engagement support to be made available for parents. However there is an explicit commitment in the National Parenting Strategy to deliver support for parents experiencing poverty to engage in their child’s education. We urge the Committee to consider the extent to which this measure has been implemented at local level and what impact delivery can have on closing the attainment gap.
6. Whether there are any new measures that could realistically be taken (for example, by the Scottish Government, local authorities, parents’ forums, the voluntary sector etc.) to help parents raise their child’s attainment

To help make progress in closing the achievement gap, we believe that measures in Scotland must focus on providing improved support for low income parents to engage in their child’s learning. Save the Children recommends:

**Scottish Government:**
- **Consider how to ensure that families living in poverty can access evidence based parental engagement support:** parents should have the right to access support to help them engage effectively in their child’s education.
- **Produce national standards on parental engagement support:** this should provide a clear definition; identify the most effective practice and help promote information about what works to those commissioning services.
- **Improve training on using what works:** training and continuing professional development opportunities should build knowledge and understanding of what works and develop skills and capacity on using evidence data. It could also focus on how to conduct effective monitoring and evaluation.

**Education Scotland:**
- **Strengthen inspection and improvement:** we believe that increased accountability is required to help close the gap. Inspection processes should examine the support education settings (with a focus on primary schools) are providing for parents from low income families to engage in their child’s learning and how evidence is being used to inform strategies e.g. through Journey to Excellence and How Good is Our School evaluation frameworks.

**Local Government:**
- **Audit existing strategies and approaches:** this should look at what is in place already at local level to support parental engagement, identify good practice and assess any gaps.
- **Provide poverty awareness training:** staff recruitment and initial training, induction procedures and continuing professional development should seek to increase understanding of the impact of living in a low income household on children’s learning at home and at school and the ways in which schools can support this group of children. This is particularly important in schools with lower numbers of children living in poverty e.g. where poverty is more hidden.

**Schools:**
- **Audit and implement strategies for engaging with parents experiencing poverty:** as part of continuous improvement schools should identify children experiencing poverty in their school, examine how families of these children are engaging with the school and their child’s learning and seek to identify how processes could be improved, including through consultation with parents.

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